NOVEMBER 8th ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LX No. 3

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

Adventure

November 8th

A Romance of the Singing Bird Mountains

The Wolf Pack

A Complete Novelette

By Raymond S. Spears

A Story of the Sea-Ports

At Eliza's

By W. Townend

A War Story of Father and Son

Retreat

By J. D. Newsom

A Story of the Gray Maiden

Hanno's Sword

A Complete Novelette

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

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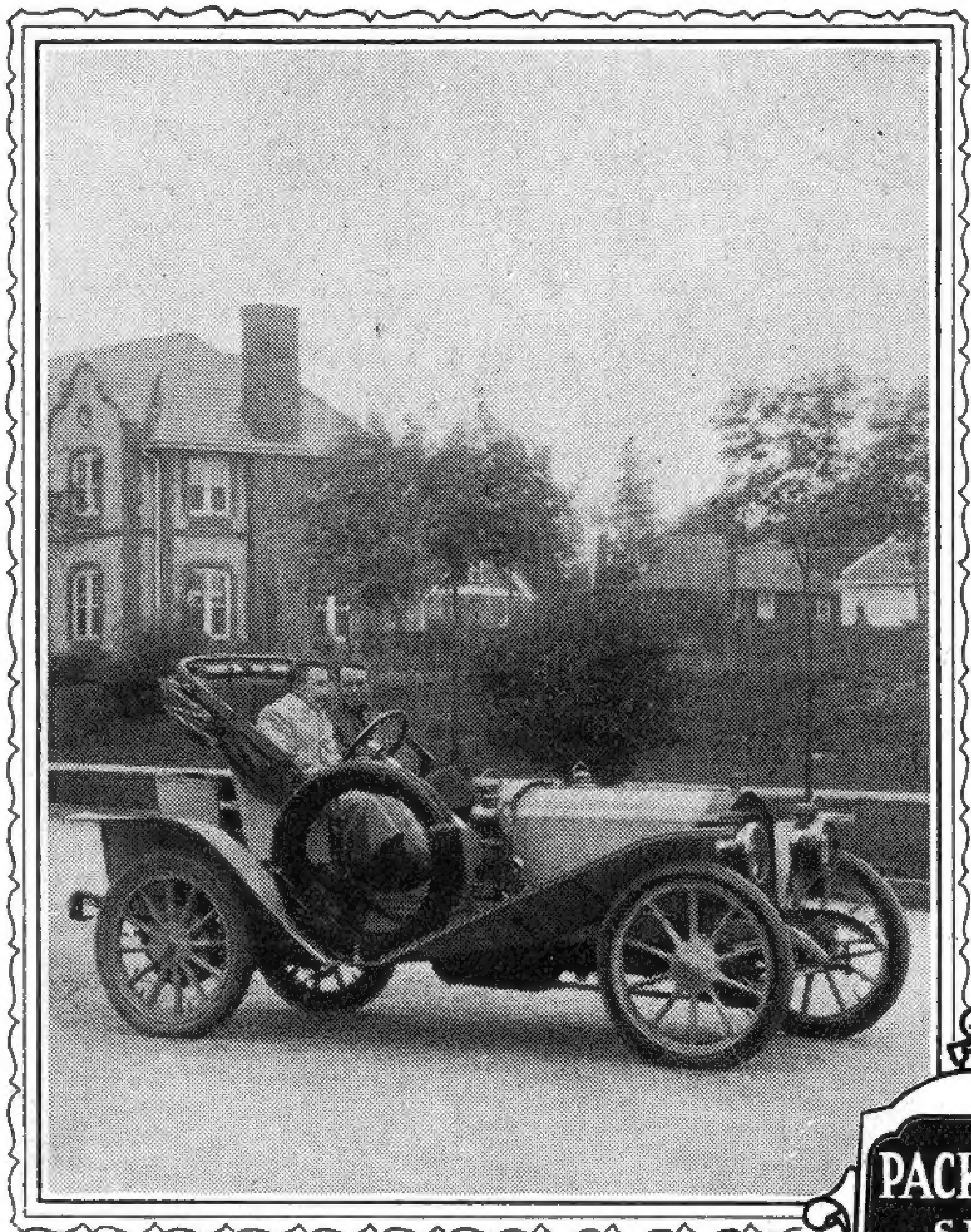

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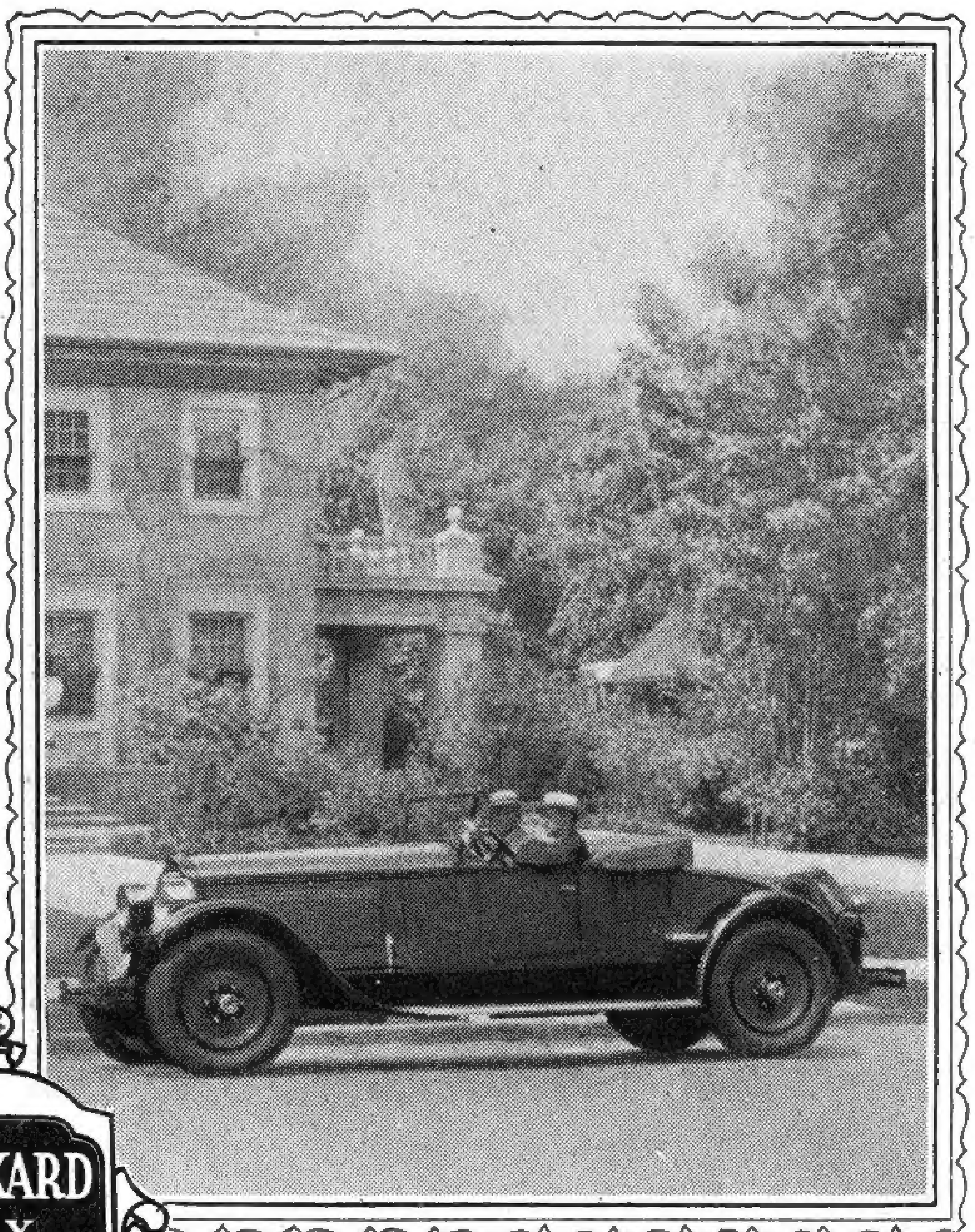

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woman was a mere chattel---when Nineveh was besieged and he saw that it must fall he collected his wives and treasures and burned them with himself in his palace. Since then the status of woman has varied greatly; at times man bought and sold her; under the Caesars she was his equal before the law. Christianity did much to emancipate women; it has remained for twentieth century America to make her a fetish. To-day she dominates; her pre-eminence is undisputed. She is the *motif* of most discussions. Our newspapers, magazines, and novels show how great is the place she occupies in the thoughts of all, and how powerful her influence for good or evil in every relationship of life. Of all subjects that have interested mankind throughout the ages, the greatest of all still---as it was in the Garden of Eden---is

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Nov. 8th, 1926

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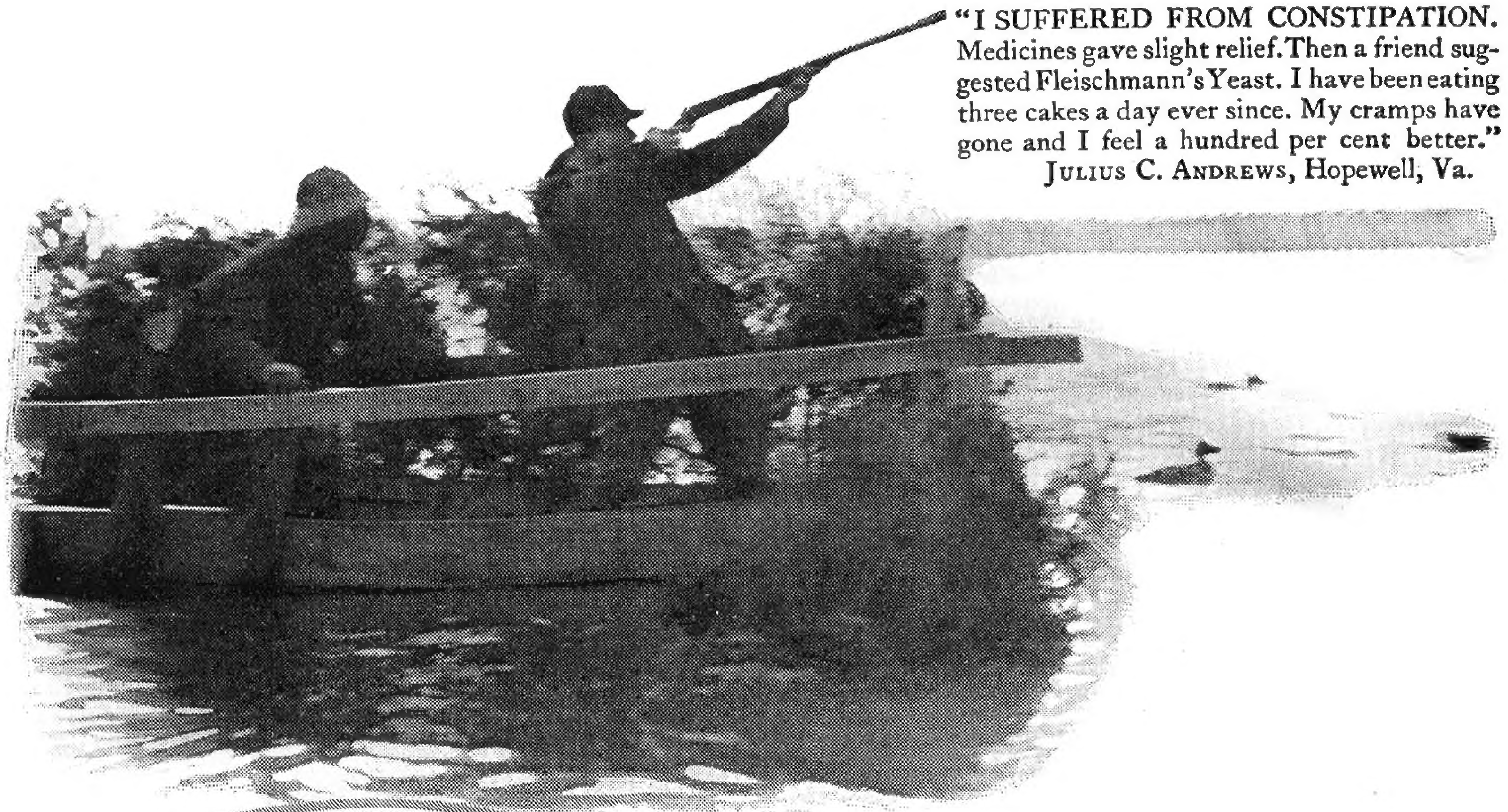

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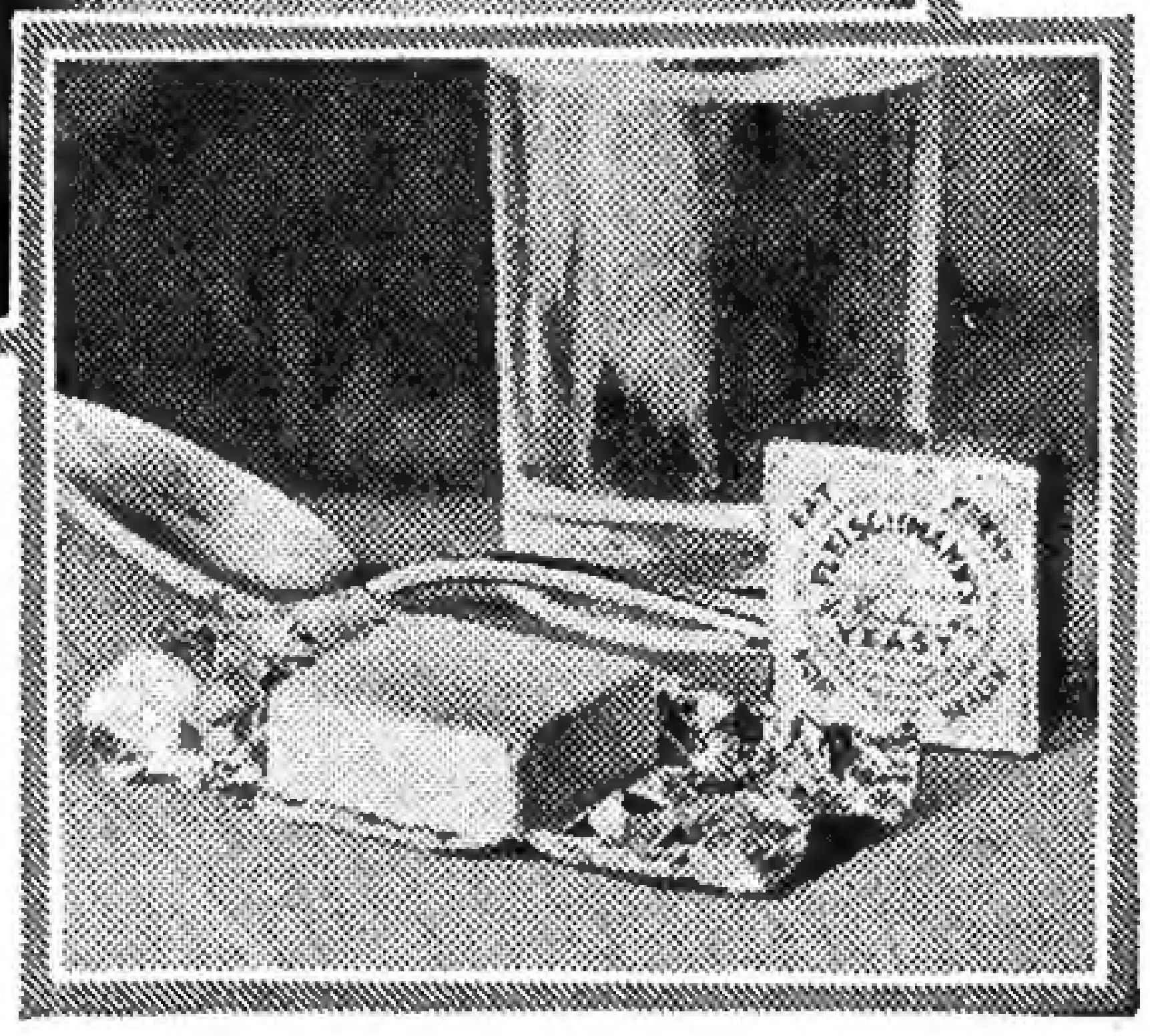

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1926

VOL. LX. NO. 3

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Issue of November 8

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, *Editor*

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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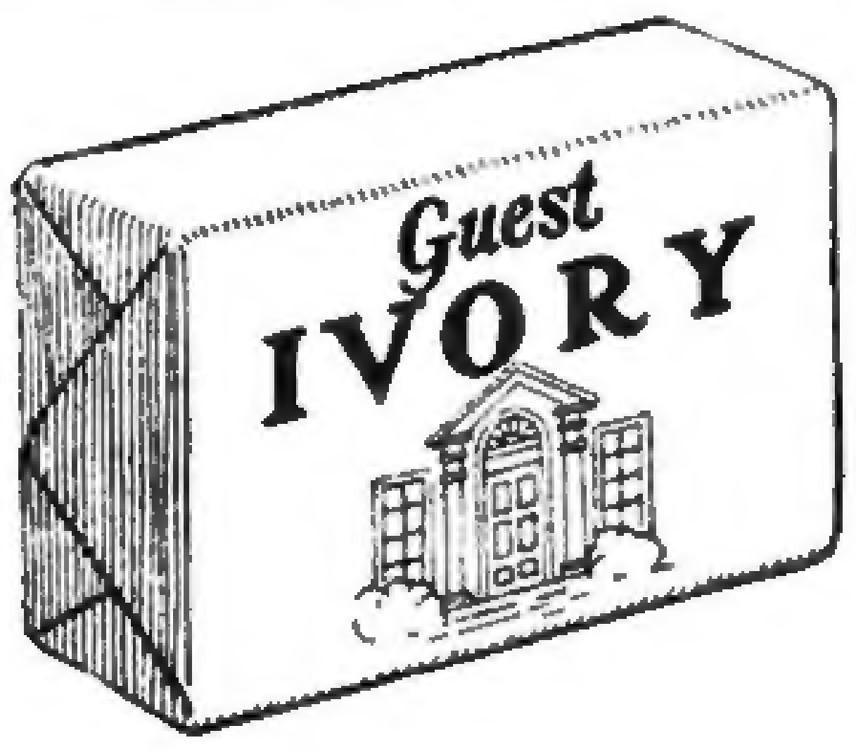

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For the face and hands ❦ As fine as soap can be

Advertising section continued in rear of book

THE SONS OF REUBEN

by *Judson Hanna*

THE daughters of Heth and Heshbon mourn his going,
Reuben singing beyond the city gates
Down to a land and an end beyond his knowing,
Wherever the last adventure waits.

* * * * * * * * * *

The men of Reuben go not up to the threshing.
The shearing-stocks and the wine-press know them not.
Increase of flocks, nor joy in the earth's refreshing
Bind them, nor stores that the months allot.

To Zebulon's keeping are given the ports and havens.
To Levi's keeping their urim and thummin gods.
But Reuben breaks the land where the wolf-pack ravens,
Nor tarries to reap of the fruitful clods.

Naphtali waters in peace his flocks and cattle.
Judah builds strong cities that cloud the sun.
The men of Benjamin arm themselves for battle
To keep the borders that Reuben has won.

The sons of Reuben are doomed to wander forever.
Cursed with unrest they follow a vision, a dream,
Never to know the kinship of children, never
To rest in the hearth-fire's kindlier gleam.

They see afar a light that is past eye-seeing.
They hear the far-off murmur of magic seas.
They reach for a star, and follow the phantom fleeing,
Drawn by the beauty of unknown leas.

In their going forth the moon and the frost shall blind them,
The burning arrows of noonday pierce their eyes.
They curse with their lips, they mock the powers that bind them,
Yet on, till the sound of their going dies.

Theirs for a season the kingdoms of far-off places,
Ever the land beyond the land they know:
Ever the farther shore, and the white oases
Where loud Uranian rivers flow.

Then up and away and follow the dream-star setting!
New things grow old with the seeing, and old things pall.
A cry in the dark, at the last, and a sharp forgetting,
And a mother in Reuben weeps at the wall.

* * * * * * * * * *

Kedar sits in its tents and mocks his going,
Reuben going with morning light in his eyes
Down to a land and an end beyond his knowing,
Wherever the last adventure lies.

*R*aymond S. *S*pears

You will remember his

"A Fifteen-Cent Meal" *and* "The Were-Cougar"

gives us

A Complete Novelette *of the Fur Country*

THE WOLF

CHAPTER I

CRIMES OF THE KILLERS

"FIND out anything?" "Wool-Head" Dan Plack growled impatiently, in a voice that matched his shaggy, whiskery crown and huge weight of brawn.

"Yes," Delos Conklin answered, as he swung down from his lank horse, stripping his saddle and bridle off, "Lop-Ear's pack have been killing white-face babies up those draws of the Singing Birds. I counted eleven, since we were there last week, besides the old ones."

Wool-Head grumbled, his heavy body twitching as if he had been tied. For the first time a problem of the range was too much for him. Wolves, big lobos, had become stock killers in the Bell Brand range while evading all efforts to destroy them. The rancher was wholly unaccustomed to the feeling of helplessness. Successfully he had held his own against cattle thieves and homesteaders, sheep flock diplomacy and other invaders. His utmost contempt was displayed when he called an enemy a coyote. He now abused coyotes in a low, thundering flow of language which resembled a storm over the Sparkling Dawn Mountains that stretched to the eastward of the buildings, corral, fenced alfalfa and enormous spaciousness of the Flats of the Dancing Sand Maidens, the miles on miles of sage, sand and alkali to the westward.

The whispering and almost metallic sounds of Noisy Waters Creek were reflected down over the outfit in echoes from the huge megaphone of the cañon. Sunset had passed and the tired cowboy dropped his saddle over a tie-rail. The music of the cascading stream grew louder and Wool-Head's easy-flowing profanity mingled with the peaceful water melody as the cowboy, gem-blue eyed and handsome in weariness, even, paused to listen, caught by a novel sensation of satisfaction. Such contrasts of anger and peace were always surprizing him, delighting his longing for something different, strange and charming. At the same time he hid from Dan Plack his poetic appreciation of this situation. It would be quite useless to try to explain to the rancher why the predicament of the range was so pleasing.

Conklin leaned for a minute against his warm saddle, breathing slowly. He turned his head to sweep with his glances all the horizons of this enormous and colorful valley. From the rose crystal hue of the sky overhead to the dark blue of the huge mountain range in the twilight shadow beyond the Sparkling Dawns to the eastward—a patch visible through the Wagon Pass—around by the mirage of a sea approaching like a tidal wave out of the southward to the Needle

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PACK

Tops like golden topaz and ruby, where lusters of pearl and gleams of precious stone facets marked the passing of the sun, as far as the dark timber belt of the range at the northward there was not one dull patch the size of a hand. Weary with all that day's riding, his eyes dimmed by the glarings of the cloudless hours, and fairly reeling with weakness, even as he mustered his remaining strength of endurance, the cowboy listened to the desert notes, gazed at the wilderness gleams, fairly gasping for his lungfuls and sighed with content. Such an experience was worth being staggering tired.

Still, he knew better than to say so. Other cowboys were around, a pretty Cherokee breed-widow was cooking for the outfit, and Wool Head Dan was in a mood to seize any least opportunity to burst into a cloudburst of rage, venting his general indignation upon any convenient mark. Conklin knew it was discreet not to talk of the beauty of scenery which hid miscreant disasters and heavy losses, difficult to meet. This was one of his own disappointments, making him quieter, less demonstrative and perhaps more competent than any of his fellows in the crew. He had been sent to look the north lines over. His report that Lop-Ear's pack had jaw-wracked a lot of calves was, to all the minds but his own, the most important thing he had seen that day. He was sorry for the rancher—who would have knocked him down for an expression of pity. For himself the day had been full to overflowing. Even with the wolf tracks, the running prints of their paws in the sand, the dark patches where the calves had been torn to pieces, the magpies, jays and other meat-hawks perching on the torn, tender bodies of the animals, the cows pawing the ground and bellowing, the inestimable privileges of a hard and beautiful land had given the rider sixteen hours of compensation for what all who knew him must have called his folly and his crime of wasted opportunities.

PRETTY SHELLS saw him coming. Her dark eyes took note of the difficult progress he made over the crumbled earth, swaying as his high-heeled boots tipped this way and that on the hoofprints of many horses. She shrugged her shoulders. He was headed for the water barrel tap. When he reached for the dipper she handed to him a bowl of coffee not too hot to drink, strong and black. He paused to stare at her.

"Thank you— Thank you!" he exclaimed, and she detected the note of wonder in his voice. He was grateful for her sympathy. He sat down on a bench and drank. All who worked on the Bell Brand ranch came to evening work-worn. The widow, herself, was tired. But she knew

Conklin had saddled at least two horses that day, and probably three or four from among scattered animals of the ranch. The one he rode in was limp-kneed weary, at that.

A good wash, a few minutes' rest, the stimulus of the coffee and the expectation of a luscious cattle country meal brought Conklin in better strength to the big dining hall. He ate with gusto, though not too much. When he had finished and the kitchen help were washing the dishes for the clean-up, Pretty Shells found Conklin out at the concrete water tank in the center of which boiled up a sparkling mound of piped-in water. He was looking at the golden glow of an ascending moon which was still hidden below the crest of the Sparkling Dawns.

"You look— You always look at the sky and at the far away!" she accused him.

"If I looked too close I might be blinded," he replied.

"Might be blinded?" she repeated, puzzled.

"I know better than to look straight at the sun, not being an eagle," he answered.

For a time she contemplated his words as she watched his face in the starlight reflections from the surface of the water tank. She was a grave featured young woman, if she was not veiling her thoughts behind a smile or a taunt.

"You mean— You mean *me?*" she asked, "So you don't look at *me*—!"

She laughed. He had paid her a very pretty compliment as an excuse for not looking at her. Men usually neglected the scenery when she was in sight. Quite possibly, Delos Conklin's lack of boldness in this matter accounted for her rather special interest in him. He had now made amends in a few words, she realized.

"You went into the timber today?" she inquired. "Up the Singing Birds?"

"Yes; not far, though; just to the Boiling Sand ponds."

"And is my cabin still there?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, yes! I ate my lunch at your table. I brewed my tea in the old crockery pot. A squirrel came and sat on the door-sill to look at me."

"And is there fur around there—marten, mink—beaver?"

"Lots of tracks. Old Lop-Ear and his band ran along the sand of the shore— The lake's pretty low."

"Yes?" she asked. "The wolf always runs in sand. It cleans the dirt from his paws. A cat, the little lynx or the great cougar always walks along the foot of a great precipice if she can. We caught plenty of fur and some good hides when we, my husband, Running Voice, and I lived in that stone house. I am going soon to live there again."

"Not alone!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" she shrugged her shoulders. "Here, cooking for all your hungry teeth, I work from starlight before dawn till starlight after sunset. My husband, a successful trapper, was a good man. He had no enemies, yet some one shot him down, leaving no trace but the empty .33 caliber shell where he lay in ambush. I found my dead man where he fell on the trap-line up the inlet above Falling Leaves pond. I brought him down here. He lies buried under the mound of stones there on the little hill beyond the ranch corral, near me now. When Running Voice was gone I was lonely.

"Now I am going back to live in the cabin by the Boiling Spring ponds. No one has trapped there since that time. No new lines have been blazed, so it remains mine according to the customs of the trappers. I shall soon ask you to bring my ponies in. I know you boys will be gentle and pack them for me. I am going back to my cabin. I shall blaze the trails more plainly. I shall trim out the twigs and deadfall tops. The squirrel and the jay will keep me company. I may hear the wolves passing in the night. Perhaps a cougar will wail as he walks the high forest friendless and feared. I can think again my own thoughts and do my own things."

"And what'll they be?"

"You think having no men to cook for I'll lack for occupation?" she asked him. "You helped me forget the man I loved. The scar of my sorrow still remains. Sometimes it still hurts. You think I am a squaw. I ought to be stirring vegetables in soup, basting roasting meats in pans, and bringing coffee for tired men to drink. But that is not my occupation. Have not I plaited lariats of rawhide strong to hold the most powerful steers? Did one ever stretch in the rain, or break that you know? Those chaps you wear— Who made them? And when you wished to save the wildcat skin you shot last December, who stripped and fleshed it, who worked it soft and sewed it in a rug for your mother?"

"You mean you'll trap and make up furs?" he asked.

"I know how."

"Well, if you caught Lop Ear, it'd be worth five hundred dollars bounty."

"He is a wise wolf, that old scoundrel." She shook her head. "He makes few mistakes. The bullet which let his ear fall dangling was a lesson he never forgets. He is not yet my enemy. He and his pack came in after my husband died. You know I saw them all passing by this spring? I told no one that Lop-Ear now limps a little as he runs. He perhaps knows steel traps. He is difficult to fool. It may be no human yet knows enough to inveigle him into jaws of death."

"That's so!" Conklin exclaimed. "I noticed he favors his left forepaw as he runs; he doesn't let his weight fall on it; it'll take a wise trapper to catch him."

"There is nothing the matter with your eyes," she remarked. "I know by that you have been a trapper, a reader of trails. You are good in the round-up. You ride well. No one is more faithful when cutting or branding. You earn your wages. But your heart is not in the cattle business. You are never so industrious as when you are sent to ride the rims of the valley to estimate the herds, find the cows and their calves, or report the damage of Lop-Ear's raids. In what is your heart, then?"

"And you are not a blanket-squaw!" he exclaimed.

"No, that is true," she admitted. "I was in Carlisle Indian School. I was a teacher of classes. I am a Cherokee, and Sequoyah who invented the alphabet of our language was my mother's great-grandfather."

"What are you doing here!"

"Cooking for the Bell Brand outfit," she laughed.

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely, "I am not minding my own business."

"True!" she mocked him. "You are an industrious cowboy. You are very dirty, with dust behind your ears. You, too, have been a college graduate. On you was spent the years of a family, giving its best. For some poor devil the job you hold as cowboy would be a great opportunity. He is on foot, somewhere, now, out of work or bent with despair."

"And you—!" he turned on her sharply.

"I am cooking, when I should be doing beautiful bead work, dressing rare furs and perhaps, as I toil, thinking in my soul some great feat to perform for my people! Oh, I how how wasteful I am! I am humble beneath the sting of your rebuke on the waste of my talents. I am sorry and unforgivable. When Sunday comes will you have my horses in the corral, the fractious ones gentled by the boys; the pack saddles I have repaired? My outfit will be ready."

"You'll leave— So soon?"

"I have some conscience," she replied. "A woman needs it, you know."

He gritted his teeth as she turned again to her kitchen.

When Pretty Shells asked the rancher for her time, the huge fellow shook his shaggy head, gesticulating and shouting. What the Hades did she think she was going to do? Wasn't she the best blamed cook from Cajon Pass to Hole-in-the-Wall? Didn't he know it, and everybody? A woman who'd work as steady as she had for come three years had no business quitting, but ought to keep at it, indefinitely. Still, it was useless to argyfy with a woman. He brought her in gold the wages for thirty-odd months. He brought her as a gift a good wagonload of supplies, too; things she would need for her fool project of going up to the Boiling Sands ponds to her cabin. He sent a wagon and two men, with one of the kitchen help squaws along with her string of horses and the boys had these animals pretty well gentled—at least broken enough for her to ride, if she needed to.

"Dog-gone!" Old Wool-Head swore. "Losin' calves to them wolves an' losin' the best danged cook to a woman's fool notion—Ain't nothing helpless es a man like that—"

The wagon did not return till afternoon of Tuesday. The teamster reported Pretty Shells as safely landed at her stone cabin, bag and bundles. She had brought in from a cache her murdered husband's rifle and ammunition, his revolver belt and knife sheath, and other necessities. She had accepted a .22 caliber rim-fire special repeater which Conklin had given her, coloring at this token of his esteem.

"Shoot a hundred of the thousand shells," he had advised her. "Then you need never lack for meat to eat."

"I can shoot straight," she said. "My husband, he taught me much. I think, perhaps, he knew I should need to know such things."

Finding the squaw-cook had really taken

her departure, Wool-Head went over the Wagon Pass into Tribulation, the supply town of the whole region, and caught "Pasty Face" Begane, a wild rider who had been broken but not gentled by a savage rodeo horse at Gunshot some years before. Pasty Face, crippled a little in the legs and body was badly distorted in his mind—but he could cook.

THE night after the wagon came down from the Singing Birds all the sleepers in the ranch were awakened by the passing of Lop-Ear's pack in the dark. Yelping wraiths of the sage and alkali, they filled the vast Flats of the Dancing Maids with their jubilant squealing, baying, careless rage. It was as if they were taunting the humans who listened, despite themselves, shivering at that challenge out of an ancient past when human beings must stand back to back, clubs against fangs in defense of life. The wolves were crossing from the Sparkling Dawns to the Needle Tops. Long after their loping had carried them down into the low bottoms a shrill squeal with carrying music in its vibration returned clear as a tocsin and rattled the drums of uneasy ears.

In the morning when at dawn the ranch crew sat down to breakfast Wool-Head growled and snuffled over his chunks of meat and hot bread, sure sign of outbursts of rage during the day. His bull-red eyes rolled as he glanced at his men. He lifted his lips from clenched teeth as he heard the voice of Pasty Face Begane swearing shrilly in the kitchen looking for his tools, which he had not yet grown accustomed to finding. The cowmen ate even faster than usual and escaped to the corral in the effort to stand from under the gathering wrath of the rancher whose snarling had already begun for the day.

Wool-Head seemed to pay no attention to these swift getaways. When only Delos Conklin remained, as always more leisurely than the others, for he refused to bolt and gulp his food, the rancher's sidelong glances turned more and more to the rider who said less yet did more than any other hand in the outfit, and with less stir. Conklin ate with cool precision. He had his manners, possessing which was something of an insult to many a cow-ranch crew. The huge bulk of the owner, hanging over the long white platter which served him as a plate, moved and twitched as with face down he worried into his food like a heavy grizzly bear, his glances looking through the screen of outbristling grayish-red eyebrows to watch the slow satisfaction of the gentleman of the range.

A bully of the cattle country often finds seemly manners an excuse for insulting taunt. Wool-Head Dan Plack wanted trouble under which to bury his consciousness of helplessness on account of the murdering wolves. Nevertheless, he hesitated to say one word to this silent, slender and most efficient rider. The better the worker in the pasture, the quicker he would resent an insult of any kind. Conklin could eat as long as the owner himself and get away with it. But knowing the fitness of things, the cowboy went out first to the corral, caught a gaunt brute known as Many Devils and was giving him the necessary morning gentling when Wool-Head came charging out to saddle his own huge quarter-Belgian draft mare.

"Conklin," Plack turned to the rider, "find out where them —— wolves live, will ye?"

"Yes, sir!" the cowboy nodded and went over to the kitchen for his grub. He loaded a pack horse with camp outfit and with his rifle boot on the saddle soon jogged westward across the Dancing Maid flats, following down the alfalfa fence taking pot-shots at jack-rabbits with a .22 caliber rim-fire snake pistol and bait gun as he rode. He shot several pests and left them kicking in the dust.

Some three miles distant he swung into the tracks of the wolf band. They had thrown the loose sand which the wind daily drifted down the lee, plowing with all their paws—except the favored right fore foot of the leader, which just touched the sand so delicately at each leap as to make a clear shallow intaglio impression of the pad. The biggest wolf wallowed along throwing the crystalline particles. The half-breed dog-wolf jumped a half farther than the others, a slim villain of tremendous speed if need be. The female, queen of the pack, ran a crooked line, throwing the others off their stride in the playful mood or indifferent way of her sex.

Conklin laughed as he read these tracks of a rare band of animal villains that ranked importantly with other bandits of the great pasture region.

Other desperadoes were in that wild country. The man who had killed the husband of Pretty Shells, for example, was unknown and furtive—bad. He had never been identified with any one. He might be a hermit, one of the nesters from over in Disappearing River basin, or just one of the thieves of the country—a wandering vagabond with hidden camps, or only a tarpaulin spread down for his resting places.

There were forty or fifty thousand square miles of country traversed by a road here and there, a shipping station on a railway so distant as to be hardly considerable as a feature of the region. Years before it had been a Land of Hope into which ventured a good many thousand home-seekers, but for twenty years it had been steadily losing population, becoming more and more a Desert of Lonely Men.

The primitive desolation fascinated Delos Conklin, who loved its difficulties, dangers and beauty. Wool-Head Plack could have paid him no more satisfactory compliment than to send him out to find the wolf den, or dens. Only a good man could hope to discover Lop-Ear's home country.

The Needle Tops were far away, nearly a day's ride to the westward. Their fastnesses were little known. Their isolation gave them mystery and romance, making them a fit place for dens of savage beasts or hard humans.

CHAPTER II

PRETTY SHELLS RESUMES POSSESSION

HAVING gone Indian, fleeing to the wilderness, Pretty Shells yielded to the instinct which urged her to return to the Singing Bird Mountains, to occupy again the stone cabin she and her husband, Running Voice, had built on Trembling Leaves pond. She liked all the boys of the Bell Brand outfit. After they had come to understand her virtue and her pride they respected her feelings. They treated her well. She particularly had talked with Delos Conklin who understood the voices of the living desert nights and who read the trails of the wilderness for the news of the many creatures, finding him interesting and attractive in his reticence, for he was not talkative nor boisterous in his bearing.

She had been unable longer to resist the desire to climb five thousand feet up the mountain side to dwell alone in the building of flat stones, some of whose memories would be painful, reminding her of a happiness now departed. When she went out over the trap-lines she had followed for years with her husband, or going over loops alone to meet him in one or other of the line cabins, she found them all undisturbed. No cache of the traps she had taken up was disturbed. The old blaze marks, blue with ooze of pitch or gum, still marked plainly the way from cubby to cubby on fur runway after fur runway.

Especially she sought with anxiety trace or track of some other trapper coming to claim this fur pocket; apparently not one human foot had trod any place in all this great domain; much less had any other trapper appeared to blaze his claim to this wealth of peltry which had increased till everywhere she found the signs of their paws, hair where they had rubbed and scratches where they had climbed trees or run upon the ground. She knew by this that the stars were propitious, the spirits not unwilling to have her appear there again.

When she clipped branches and blazed plainer marks to show her the way lest she forget, she renewed her ownership to the whole territory as far as the lines she and Running Voice had stretched them. This was Fur Land law. Any violator would at his peril break the peace by attempting to set his traps or seize the peltry of the now closed forests on the south side of the Singing Birds.

Pretty Shells, having followed each of the main and loop trails along which stood the old cubbies, sat again in her main cabin doorway, with a curious squirrel puzzled by her silence and a raven piping odd noises, insufficient for so large a bird. She saw with great contentment the rippling of zephyrs which clawed the clear waters of the pretty little lake. She sighed with pleasure as trout broke the water, their rainbow colors flashing amid the blue and white reflections of the sky. She knew she had done exceedingly well, although she had reverted, if not to savagery, at least into an aboriginal setting.

Her outfit included tools and articles of wildcraft, and also shelves of books, a working library which repeated echoes from tribes of long ago in tales of gods and fairies, including stern ethnological reports with literal translations of traditions of Red Indian Thunder Gods, the Evening Sky, of Squirrel and Mink, Beaver and Otter, the Most Fighting Pekan and the Most Swaggering Bear. Thus she combined the practical with the spiritual with an odd unity of what some call Truth.

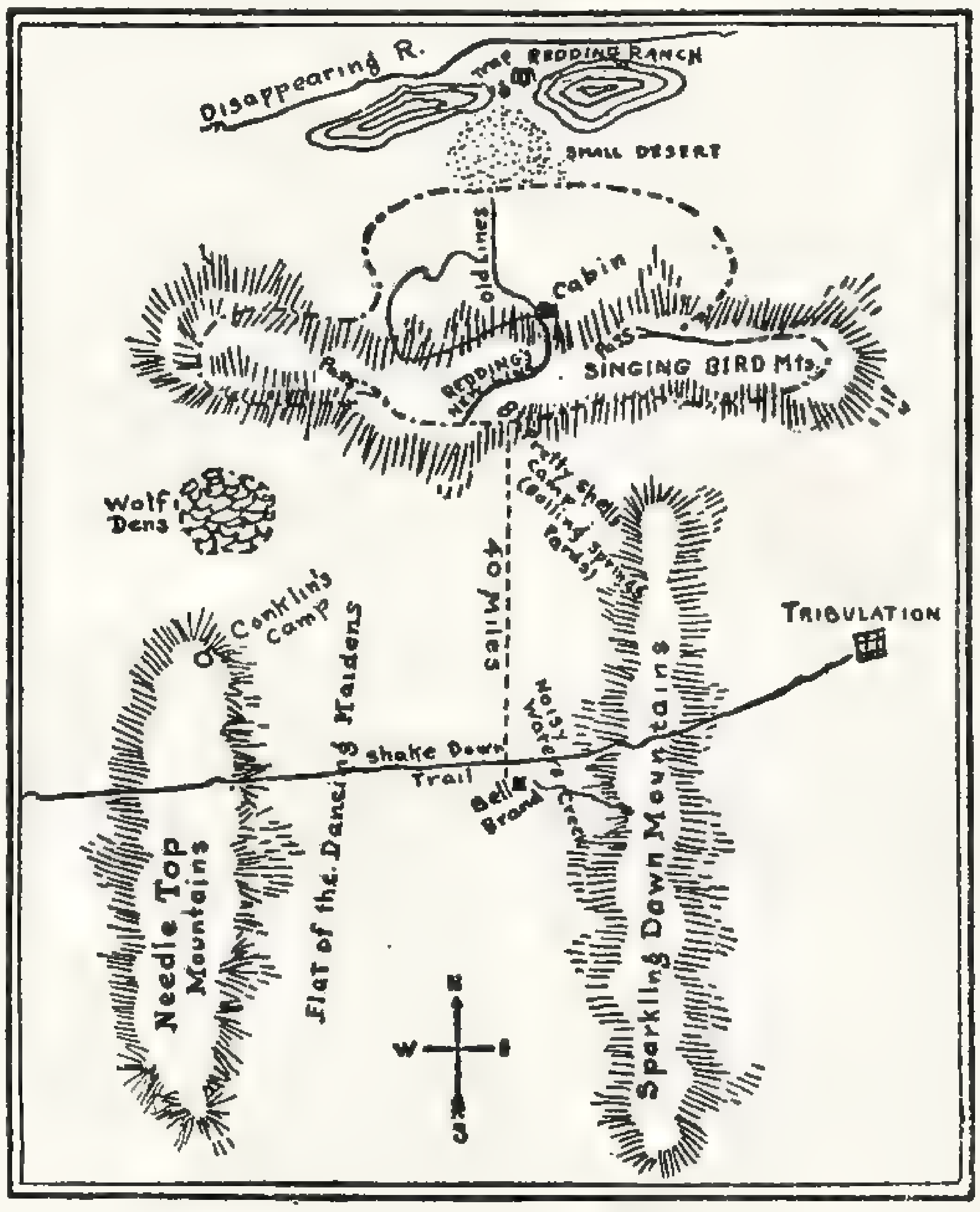
One thing brought a frown to her smooth forehead, leading her to look askance toward the depths of the forest which surrounded her, extending from a thousand feet below her level to several thousand feet higher up the mountain side. Her tragedy of the wilderness had never been solved. The scoundrel who had assassinated Running Voice, robbing him of furs and money belt, was still abroad unnamed and unsuspected—bad.

Running Voice was shot down from behind, with no chance for his life. He had never in his life harmed any man. His good nature had not saved him from the bullet of a coward, who fled like the shadow of a passing cloud. Pretty Shells could never understand why her man had been taken from her

The daughter of Clyde Byron and of Falling Rain was not stupid. When she saw the sun go down and night settled in silence upon the mountain bench she barred the heavy door and sat in the shadow beside the blazing fireplace struggling against her own timidity. She was not sorry she had come. At the same time, she strained her ears to catch any sound. When her husband had gone over his trap-lines, she had remained alone in her cabin unconscious of fear. Now she struggled with her two minds, one frightened and the other loving the grandeur of this beautiful isolation. She had not foreseen her dilemma. Now in full force she felt the terror of the dark and the rising tide of her courage.

In her heart confidence won. She conquered her dreads. The jangle of conflicting emotions subsided into the harmony of her sympathy with her surroundings. If she whistled in one way she would hear the answering neigh of the two horses she always had kept gentled and tame. If she gave voice to other cries jays and magpies answered, or squirrels and even foxes. In the daytime when she saw a shadow flit along the sand, cast by the sun, she gave a shrill, penetrating and wilderness-filling call with the result that sure enough a great peregrine falcon swerved to return at a terrific pace answering the challenge, only to be baffled by his failure to discover who thus had given throat to his own kind's battle cry.

Pretty Shells had been one with her man. She had carried a rifle as he hunted and she had killed game. She read the tracks of the creatures. If a blue wing fluttered far out in the green timber shadows her quick eyes detected the motion. And she had killed meat for the kettle, peltry for the fur buyer, and dried sinews with which to sew soft buckskin and had fastened beads to knife sheaths or shapely moccasins. She had handled all the furs her husband caught, dressing them each skin according to its hair or fur. And though she usually had accompanied Running Voice over his distant trap-lines, tending the traps, she had also run her own short loops around the ponds and up the mountain gulches near home. She need depend on no man now.



In three years the Boiling Sands string of ponds had become a fur pocket. Mink were running along the shores and up the streams in broad day. She found the hair of red foxes and pekans on their runway logs. She discovered claybank otter slides and beaver dams which were drowning hundreds of acres of level forest bottoms. The hoof prints of venison were in runways on ridge backs and through knolls. She could live here in these Singing Bird mountains indefinitely. No one had set traps anywhere on this, the south side of the range, since she carried the body of her husband down to bury him at the Bell Brand ranch.

Methodically she set about her inevitable tasks. She could not always be sure of having deer close by. Accordingly she killed a fine three-year-old buck, stripped off the skin and cut the meat into strips. These she salted in the hide, a layer of salt and a layer of meat. Then she tied up the bundle for twenty hours or so. Taking out the meat she washed each piece carefully in fresh water, strung it all on stiff green sticks and having made a bed of hardwood coals, she hung the meat over them in the smokeless heat till, after three or four hours, the pieces stopped dripping. She wrapped the dried chunks in a tight bag and hung it on a wire from a rafter until she should need it. The meat would keep indefinitely.

Fish she caught as she had learned to do back in Pennsylvania where she went to school. A light rod with lines, leaders, reel and flies fairly hummed to the rushes and lunges of the bright-hued trout. She took more than a hundred big fellows, two, three and four pounders and dried them with salt and smoke.

She gathered berries, nuts, roots and seeds. She plodded at her tasks. She carried heavy burdens. She worked with steadfast patience, giving thought to each thing she did. She marshaled all her forces to fasten a bead the size of a pinhead on a gauntlet, or to drag to her cabin the long pole of a dead pine which took all her strength. Her watchfulness and knowledge were Indian, but her foresight and stores of food and firewood were white. She grained and knuckled the brains of the deer she had killed into the stretched skin, converting it into a beautiful piece of soft, tawny buckskin. She cut it to a pattern and sewed a short skirt out of it, with bead designs and fringed seams as well as hem.

She killed porcupines, dyeing the quills, eating the delicate meat of the legs and even saving the thin skin for pouches. She read the signs of the forest, watching the aspens and noticing the activities of the beavers, feeling the tang of the night frosts on her hands and listening to the voices of the birds.

When a flock of wild ducks pitched down over the great barrier of the Singing Bird range to come to rest with loud splashes and quacks of relief in the pond near her cabin she rejoiced. Autumn was at hand. Winter would come in due season. She was becoming more and more ready for the snow and cold. She had shaken off the low and common practises of civilization as known at the Bell Brand ranch. She had ascended from the tasks of the kitchen and the dining-room into the true feel of the beautiful lodgepole pine and Little People of the mountains and streams.

Her mind was cleared of many trivial and unimportant matters. She did not have to think in terms of so many pails full of water, so much flour, so many slabs of beef, so many huge potatoes, so much bread or pie. She merely prepared a delicate handful of bird meat, perhaps a stick of candy, a fanciful biscuit or a rich broth. She enjoyed eating, but now with her own slight necessities she became aware of how dreadful it had been to serve ten or twelve men with huge messes of grub in horrible quantites, though she smiled as she thought of Wool-Head. And of Delos Conklin she thought often with mingled feelings of pleasure and dismay.

Having performed her tasks, some which the modified skilfulness of civilization made pleasant and easy, and others to which she gave the perfect savage taste which they required, she would read an hour or two in her books, embroider and bead, seek a rabbit for a potpie or a wild goose for a pot roast—when the big fellows arrived on their south-bound flights. She was equally careful to sit a long time out under the forest canopy, her clothes, apparently so gorgeous in their colors and beauty, nevertheless blending with sunlit autumnal leaves and the dusky shadows, so that she could watch the passing of shy creatures unseen; and thus a cougar came shambling and slithering along with switching tail and moon-green eyes glaring around him in a baleful hunting lust. She shot him when he stopped to stare uneasily as he crouched, conscious of some alien presence; and presently his long, wide tawny hide was spread upon her cabin floor where she would step on it leaving her couch in the first dawn.

THEN Lop-Ear came with his pack. She had nearly forgotten the presence of these attractive outlaws. The moon was shining. The cabin pond was like a pool of milk, it was so bright and full of light. The trout swimming through the water were black fish-shapes and cast black shadows on the white-sand bottom. Migrant birds were chirruping uneasily in the trees, as if they were still on their way in the night. The green timber forest had awakened, as the desert does, in the evening. And then as they topped a ridge or knob far away, the voices of the wolves became clamorous in the gloom. Pretty Shells had been asleep. She awakened with a start, to find herself standing on the cougar-skin rug, shivering. She heard the yelping voices as they became fainter when the wolves ran down into a hollow whose sides intercepted the sounds. Then they burst forth louder as they came nearer. They were hunting over the Singing Bird Mountains; they had game started; they were exultant and rollicking in their chase.

The listener opened the door to hear the plainer. She knew the lay of the land so well that she could trace the course of the pursuit. The pack circled behind an outstanding ridge of half a mile or so length and then came around the east end, heading straight for her own pond, which she called Trembling Leaves. She shivered at their approach. And then she heard a rising tide of squeals, yelps and heavy baying, felt the increase in the speed of their run from an easy lope into a swift, dashing, sprinting race with one another.

A branch broke opposite her on the slope down to the lake. She heard the clatter of antlers where they struck small second-growth holes. And a minute later the pound of bounding hooves drummed on the night wind as the frantic quarry raced for water in which to cover its trail. The wolves were so close behind that she fancied she could hear the swish of their passing, too. There was a splash across the lake in the reflections of the trees. She had a glimpse of moonshine sparklings. She could see the shapes of the wolves when they came out of the shadows, like dark wraiths on the white sand in the gray light. She heard the snort of the deer's labored breathing, and then a sharp barking of the pursuers as for an instant they seemed to be consulting what they should do now. Then silence fell upon the scene, the echoes chasing themselves away. The waves the invisible deer rolled up cast reflections like those on the swell of a boat. The mountain night seemed to be clutched in a grim suspense. The whimperings of frightened little animals and birds trembled in the darkness. Then all was quiet.

When the listener stepped outside into the shadow of her camp she was ready to believe that the whole episode had been merely a vivid, awful dream. She could hear nothing, see nothing, feel nothing in the moonlit night. She grew slowly conscious of a relaxing of the tension. But it was only the lull in a grim tragedy.

The suspense was broken by the terrified bleat of a stricken buck. The wolves burst out anew in their weird shouting, changed now from the yelping music of the race into the hoarser and heavier portends of attack. Their shrill baying was broken and made into terrible gutturals as they took hold with their teeth, snapping and tearing, their throats full of gurgling and intermittent sounds, muffled and thrown out first on one side and then on the other as they seized, snapped and at last bored in. And then, the game torn down, the pack became a hungry swarm of snarling beasts eating their fill as they wolfed down their prey, and jostled one another with nips and yaps.

The sounds soon subsided. It did not take the brutes long to eat their fill. As their hunger was assuaged they grew quieter, and before the listener had settled, back on her heels silence again pervaded the landscape. Instead of the howls of the wolves she heard the sharp bark of an excited fox who had been listening to the invasion and now was coming near in hopes of a shred or two from the meals of majesty. A coyote, too, gave an oddly timid and doubtful call as if he wondered how safe it was to be even in the echo of such a famished passing. Three owls called a refrain.

The peaceful atmosphere, the rare and lovely sensation of safety and complaisance had been shattered by the wolves' deer hunt. The hermit Indian woman retreated behind her barred door and sat wrapped in a robe before the fireplace in which she heaped up an armful of wood. The omen was only too significant. When lobos come through it means trouble. Even great bears listen with ill patience to those scoundrels.

The pack was intact. She had heard every voice, counted six different brutes by the vibrations of their throats. She had no welcome for them, though they brought back with sharp distinctness the recollections she had of the affairs away down on the ranch at the mouth of Noisy Waters cañon. Oddly enough she missed the spaciousness of the Flats of the Dancing Maids. She felt the crowding in of the dark woods whose shadows fell upon her cabin.

In the morning she went along the edge of the timber on the south side of the lake and found where the deer had been ambushed by the clever brutality of the wolf band. The deer had landed on a sand spit, partly grown to brush and shrubs. As the animal surged toward the cover of the woods the leader of the pack cut in from behind and doubtlessly had hamstrung the tired buck. And there the other wolves had charged in from the shadows to finish and devour. Where the kill was made fox tracks ran all over the tracks of the wolves, and now that day had come a score of mountain jays had come down to pick the shreds that remained on the bones.

Pretty Shells left no moccasin tracks among the paw-prints of the animals. Heretofore she had given no thought to her own trails. Now she looked over her shoulders as if wondering whether some one was likely to follow her own footsteps. She was glad her cabin was under the trees, its front toward the open lake partly obscured by low second growth.

Her eyes looked along the opposite shore, searching the lines of gray tree trunks, pausing to study the shadows or the questionable shapes. She looked back into the near thick stand of slim, tall timber in which she could not see far. The wolves, she saw by the lead of their tracks, had headed up over a low divide the far side of which ran steeply down to the edge of the sage and open desert. Rifle in hand she worked that way, knowing the hunters were now heavy with food and probably sleeping.

She hunted with extreme caution. She made no least audible sound with the fall of her soft foot-soles The breeze, however, was not quite right, for it rolled down the mountain in cold waves on the way to the warming alkali far below.

As she came to the crest of the long low ridge there was a sudden rush over to the right, or westward. She caught a glimpse of a pale shape darting swiftly among the trees. She recognized the largest of Lop-Ear's companions. She heard the throaty whining cry of warning, low but distinct as the scoundrel escaped. She saw another, a slim black fellow, but had no chance to shoot.

When she looked around she found their warm beds where they had thrown themselves on mattings of pine needles, curled up by rock or fallen tree top to sleep off their fresh gorge.

"I should have had at least a shot or two at those beasts!" she told herself. "They've gone off down the mountain, and probably I'll never see them around here again."

Her conscience troubled her a little. This wolf pack was a menace to all the country. It killed game. It raided the cattle herds and the sheep flocks. To kill any of the lesser members of the pack would mean two hundred and fifty dollars from county and cattle association bounties. To get Old Lop-Ear himself would mean five hundred dollars. She would have been glad to pull down some of that money. Luck had played against her.

She returned to the lake shore. She paused before going out from under the cover of the trees. Her instinct to cover her tracks had now fallen into abeyance. She felt a tendency to sing, and hummed a bit. Yet like all things which dwell in the wilds she stopped short before going out into the open of the white-sand beach. Her eyes swept along the opposite shore in the restless inquiry of the wilderness wanderer.

And coming down to the lake shore opposite, a third or half a mile distant, she saw a man. He sat on his heels at the water's edge with his rifle butt on the sand as he scooped up a drink in the palm of his hand. He was too far away for her to see the exact details of his raiment, but he was tall, gray, and jack-knifed as he squatted; he unfolded oddly as he straightened up.

He stood for a moment with his rifle resting in the crook of his elbow, looking along the lake shores. Then he turned, strode into the woods again and vanished. Pretty Shells leaned trembling against a tree.

CHAPTER III

THE WOLF DENS

FOR hours as he plodded westward the Needle Top Mountains seemed to Delos Conklin to grow no nearer. Then he entered their royal purple shadow on the long slope up to their buttressing ridges. He camped after sunset at the entrance to the cañon where a trickle of spring brook water vanished in a wide alluvial fan of sand and gravel. Here, too, Lop-Ear and his outlaw band had quenched their thirst early that day. The following morning up the valley the rider found where the wolves had killed an old cow and her calf, coyotes eating what the slayers had left behind.

Only strays of the Bell Brand wandered over to The Needles. But every autumn the round-up wagon had to cross the Flats of the Dancing Maids to pick up these wanderers which probably had caught a whiff of water or perhaps the scent of grass from the rugged range. Conklin found the country rough and difficult. The wolves led him up to a mesa top, which was all that remained of another desert valley flat like the one two thousand feet lower down where the little whirlwinds lifted dust in the semblance of whirling girls. This mesa, miles long, was grown to sage and wisps of arid country weeds. The rider saw jack-rabbits and cottontails. Two or three times, when he skirted along the brink at the edge of the table-land, he saw coyotes skulking off down to lower levels when he disturbed them as they hid from the sunshine in the shadow of a rock. In some places he looked down a sheer precipice two hundred feet high, but washes had cut deep into the mesa mountain and here up the easier incline he found runways of living things, from insects to hoofed game, coming up to the high level.

Forty or fifty head of cattle were on the mesa, and in passing the wolf pack had run two or three of these over edges and the dead carcasses of these animals lying on the jagged rocks far below showed how wanton had been the attacks. At the north end of the mesa the wolves went over the brink, running down into a clump of stunted cedars. At sight of these Conklin turned back, went over the west side and descended to the same level two miles distant. Here he hobbled his horses and rifle in hand hunted around into the juniper belt.

Sure enough, he found where the wolves had stopped to lie down. They had loafed for several hours in the cover from night wind and day vision. But they had departed several hours before Conklin arrived, heading down into the wide bare valley toward the northwest. The hunter hesitated as he looked across the miles of desolation. Then he returned, cooked himself a young jack-rabbit, repacked his fed horses and started on the trail again, knowing how useless it was to pursue these traveling brutes. At the same time he could see they were headed for some real timber where the north end of the Needle Tops sloped down into the valley beyond which rose the majestic Singing Birds. A long dry night, walking most of the time to rest his saddle horse, Conklin plodded on his way. Not until two hours after daybreak did he come to water at the lower rim of the timber. He had lost the wolf trail after the moon went down.

He was awakened late in the afternoon. He looked down at the spring pool from the cover of the woods. A band of sixteen antelope had come up out of the valley to drink. He shot one of these, for he needed real meat. A bunch of cattle were among the animals which drank at this good water. Four or five were mavericks, unbranded, but the others were marked with the Bell of Wool-Head Dan. Cougar tracks showed the wolves were not the only meat-eaters thereabout. A big cat came shambling around a point after Conklin had ridden along the bench of the mountain and he killed it with a fine shot from the saddle, for there is not time to take a good position when one meets such quick brutes. In half an hour the clean skin of the victim was dangling over the pack, despite the objections of the indignant horse.

North of the end of the Needle Tops was a vast low knoll, rounded in general outline, and yet covered with tip-tilted slabs and pinnacles of stone. Even in the distance Conklin could see black spots which were the shadows of cavern entrances. When at dusk he rode up to one of these he saw a grisly shape slip into a crevice among up-ended rocks. And when he made a dry camp on a flat with scant vegetation he heard snarling and yipping at a little distance. Then coyotes waxed melancholy and jeering in the thin air.

"Wouldn't be surprized if I'd found something!" Conklin admitted to himself. "Look it over tomorrow!"

He surely had. A huge mountain ridge had been washed and wasted away till it had assumed the appearance of a ruined city of savage Titans and ogres. In every patch of sand a yard in size were the tracks of coyotes, old and young. In all directions from the square miles of fresh and abandoned dens extended sage flats while toward the north and northeast rose the Singing Bird Mountains with inviting forest that stretched out of sight along the greater slope.

Riding in and out, up and down, over this devastated wreckage of geological structures, Conklin yielded to the feeling that it was a place which had known less grim conditions and better occupants than the furtive beasts of prey. His instinct was not mistaken. He came to a gorgeous display of fossil trees, a thousand acres of forest which had been inundated and turned to stone. Now the mucky sand was washing away and the dead woods were standing as monuments to their own life or lying prostrate where a cataclysm had thrown them down. And among these the searcher found the tracks of many great wolves who preferred the cemetery to the green timber which grew so well only a few hours' gallop distant.

"No accounting for tastes!" Conklin told himself, as his sun-dimmed gaze looked far in hopes of discovering where the animals drank.

He rode into a number of gulches and followed many miles of trails, finding bones of cattle here and there where they had been torn down in the wolf homeland, before he discovered what he sought. Then under a red sandstone overhanging he found an emerald pool as clear as a perfect, cloudless gem. The water was only a little salt. To the thirsty explorer it was delicious. As he bumped his head on rising, he saw over to the right a pearl-handled, four-bladed cow-country knife.

Conklin had seen no other trace of living men. He looked around with inevitable nervousness at this inexplicable indication. Perhaps some wandering cattle country nomad had in passing lost it. But the rider knew this would have to be proved to him before he would admit it. The blades were rusted only a little—yet it was pretty old rust. Throwing down his pack and saddle, hobbling the two horses to let them eat the grass which grew in single blades here and there in this coarse gravel and kettle-bottoms of clay, alkali or sand, Conklin went circling around and around in spiral course until some two hundred yards distant and up against a ledge of rocks which had a dozen bands of color, no two alike, and there in a hole, almost a cave, he found some man's camp. On a ledge was a tin pail made out of a fruit or tomato can, a baking-powder can with some matches in it, several empty .33-caliber rifle shells and a handful of charred sage-brush sticks, dead embers of a coffee and fried meat fire.

A dozen other better places to camp had been passed lower down, nearer the spring. This had some significance, but Conklin regarded the fireplace with squinting eyes and curling lip corner. The camper had stacked up a stone fence in a curve around the outside of the embers. A blaze behind these stones would not shine out across the open desert valley in any direction and even its reflections were back out of sight from the entrance to this hole in the stone. But whoever had stopped here more than once could look from the shadows out across the open land; he could by day see the tiny toy-like Bell Brand outfit down the line and across the Flat of the Dancing Maids forty or fifty miles away; and he could see around to the southwest, the west and clear around to the nearly due south. Only an outlaw, in flight though none pursued, would have chosen this particularly uncomfortable and difficult place, because it possessed advantages he needed in his affairs. One might call the place the Wolf Dens.

Conklin studied the knife. Three of its blades were thick and wide, good to whittle with, or to unjoint leg bones. But one was thin, narrow and razor keen. To a man who knew his wilds the knife told a good deal. A cowboy would have used the heavier blades, cared for one or two of these with a good deal of honing or dressing if he was methodical. But the previous owner of this pearl-handled tool had kept the thin narrow edge with closest attention.

"Marten trapper!" Conklin decided, almost offhand.

He looked across the country to the heavy green timber. The spirit of the situation made him uneasy. He returned to the spring, and made his camp like an honest man, far enough from the water to allow the thirsty creatures to come for their share, but he built no fire that night. And in the morning he shook a rattlesnake out of his tarpaulin and blanket.

"Bad country!" he thought to himself, "I don't like it a bit!"

He had heard no sound in the night, but he found his pack horse had been cut down within half a mile of where he slept. Hobbled, the poor beast had been easy prey for a band of wolves. The tracks led straight away toward the Singing Bird Mountains. They were unmistakable to the angry cowboy. Lop-Ear and his pack had worked in dreadful silence but left their signatures in the sand.

Conklin spent the day tramping and clambering over the knoll of wolf dens. It was alive with coyotes. He shot nine during the search. He found a dozen caves or holes in the rock which had unmistakably the tracks of lobo wolves. He saw one of the lobos two hundred odd yards distant rising from beside a clump of prickly pears, but missed both shots he made. He found just around the cactus where the wolf had eaten a jack-rabbit. This lobo was not a member of Lop-Ear's pack, apparently. It might even be that the silence brooding over the knoll of wolf dens, the brief demonstrations of coyote misery in the dark had been due to the presence of the ferocious and swagger band. Conklin wondered, as he returned to the remains of his horse of which the ignoble beasts had come to eat when the killers had gone on their way.

Coyotes, especially the young and yearlings were easy to knock down. The fact that Conklin had obtained two shots at the rabbit-eating lobo indicated a less knowing brute. There was somehow an analogy between the wolf raiders and the furtive human who must have been a desperado. With his real discoveries to report, Conklin hesitated between heading down the long, dry course straight to the ranch and following the wolves over to the Singing Bird Mountains. Along the green timber route he would travel quite a few more miles but he need not make any dry camps, for water was plenty on that course.

When he thought of Pretty Shells he hesitated, counting her presence at the Trembling Leaves pond as an argument against passing that way. At the same time by cutting across he need not pass within five miles of her lakeside cabin. For the rest he knew he ought to try and get a line on the forest activities of the killer pack. He knew that Wool-Head Plack would tell him to go kill the wolves. Would ask why the Hades he hadn't stayed with them. And would also add a growling taunt on learning that the savage brutes had killed the hobbled pack horse.

Delos Conklin had done no trapping and only casual hunting since he was a boy and youth. At the same time he had been an attentive listener to the stories of good trappers, and had read of a hundred feats of beguiling coyotes and wolves, accounts of which had appeared in handbooks and magazines popular in the ranch dormitory lobbies. Also he had studied the creatures wherever he rode and followed their trails wherever it had been convenient to do so, the truth being that he was a thorough "natural born" nature lover.

He could do nothing by halves. A top-hand rider, on the long beats watching the boundaries and at whatever lonely work he had to do, he filled in the vacancies of the hours of transit, the wakeful periods of riding herd, listening to the teeming life of the desert night or reading the signs in the dust of the days.

Wool-Head Plack had chosen him to hunt down those destroyers. A wise rancher, the employer had noticed the indications of special powers and desires for observation as displayed by Conklin. He had sent the cowboy out to find out where the wolves denned in. That really meant, Conklin now realized, that he must exterminate the beasts which were destroying thousands of dollars' worth of beef in the cattle ranges and making forays into the sheep country farther east doing worse damage. It had taken the rider a long time to realize the job Plack had given him to do.

ACCORDINGLY, Conklin settled into a new frame of mind. He changed his very purpose from finding out about the activities of Lop Ear's band into a determination to kill them, or drive them out of the country. He rather ridiculed his own slow wit in understanding what Plack wanted him to do. He thrilled a little, as he realized the big fellow's trust or hope. Trappers had made tentative efforts to capture the wolves. Three or four wolf-hunting dogs, Borzois, had been imported over beyond the Sparkling Dawns where ranchers in better pastures had tried to cope with the wandering scoundrels.

Late in the day, having led his loaded saddle horse across the valley in the trail of the galloping band, he lost the tracks among the rocks even before he reached the woods of the Singing Birds timber belt.

The restlessness of the wolves amazed him. They would stop for a few hours to sleep. But here they were on the move even when they had gorged at a kill. It took him all that day to see the point, but when night fell he understood. The wolves had seen him on their tracks, they had known his object, and when they had killed one of his horses they weren't going to remain anywhere near him, but would flee a day's journey before lying down to rest.

"The blamed crooks!" the amazed and wrathful hunter gasped, adding with reluctant but necessary admiration, "They know what they're about!"

For the first time any human had definitely come to understand the situation as regards Lop-Ear. Conklin camped down in a hollow by a falling spring run. He did not have need to hobble his saddle horse—a fact that probably had saved its life. He broiled a venison steak over a bed of coals. He rolled up in his tarp and blanket on a bed of pine needles under the tall trees far enough from the tinkling music of the brook so he could hear other sounds in the night.

Some time during the wane of the moon he was awakened by a howl far away. He started up, listening sharply. Presently he heard another wail in the trembling air. It was a lobo cry, he was sure. He wondered what it meant, what thought was in the mind of the beast when it called thus toward the stars in the sky. He did not know whether it was one of Lop-Ear's pack or whether it was crying for companionship. He believed he would have to learn that language, however, if he desired to accomplish the destruction of the menace to the cattle and sheep business.

On the following day he led his loaded horse along ridge-backs, in deer and elk runways, through aisles of rolling forest and scrambled in some pretty bad going over broken granite and found ways through occasional windfalls or across the pathways of landslides. Three or four times the horse stood on its hindlegs and snorted when it smelled bears. Conklin saw a number of deer, and many lesser beasts. The mountain range was well named, for birds were fluttering throughout the woods, and now and again a flock of jays or magpies would keep company with the strange phenomenon of a man with a horse. And the hunter was conscious of the feeling that these birds, especially the magpies, had seen men before and did not hold them in high regard.

A man doesn't like to believe things which aren't so, which are just plumb foolish. The very notion that he knew the minds of those birds was exasperating to Conklin. He stopped short and looked at the gay magpies which were coming along behind him. The moment he turned his head the whole flock instantly scattered and vanished with white and black flapping of departure.

"They've been shot at!" Conklin puzzled, still doubtful, but glad to be relieved by so plausible an idea. The birds would have come much closer and perhaps have been less taunting, more curious in their tones, but for their previous experiences with the deadly weapons of men.

Wool-Head Plack said no one lived in the Singing Bird Mountains. Trappers like the husband of Pretty Shells had occasionally spent a winter season catching fur in the timber belt, he had remarked, but it took good men to endure the difficulties and the brooding loneliness. It was like an Indian-blood woman to "go wild" and retreat to such a place. In thirty years since the U. S. Geological Survey had hired Plack to transport an outfit and carry supplies for the map-makers, less than a dozen people were known to have been in that wilderness which from all directions was two or three days, at the least, from any through wagon road—and it was ten days or so from a rail end.

But these birds knew a man's potentialities, they knew a human's wicked possibilities. Conklin looked over his own shoulders. Some one had killed in cold blood the good Indian, Running Voice. Only about three years had elapsed since that murder from ambush. No explanation had been given. But his widow had loved the Singing Bird country, returning to it when she could no longer resist the lure of the wilds.

Lop-Ear's pack and a human mystery were somewhere in this timber range now. Conklin figured he might as well look the country over and find out the lay of the land first as last. He gave up his intention of returning immediately to the Bell Brand outfit. He knew in a general way the kind of country toward the east, and especially along the wooden bench on which were the Boiling Sand ponds; he turned due northward to cross the divide, if he could find a way through or over.

When he thought he was on the way up the main range, he came to a valley with a lake eight or nine miles long. He recognized this as the one where the map-makers had camped. Plack had described it, and so Conklin headed for the west end, finding the old pack trail on the easy slope from the small ridge. The place where the tents had been pitched was grown to weeds and switch-timber. The stumps where trees had been cut for firewood stood around. If any one else had passed by since the site was abandoned no evidence was betrayed to the searching eyes of the investigator.

Conklin turned his horse loose on a beaver meadow up the lake inlet. Here was a level grown to grass. After some hesitation, he made his own camp back in the woods, cooking a chunk of meat as he considered the problem of his activities. Other humans in that country were none of his business—but the wolves were. The brutes hunted the green timber, the open desert, the sage and ranch lands. Probably only Pretty Shells was in the whole Singing Bird Mountains. At the same time he felt the warning in the furtive watchfulness of the birds. They had made a tremendously deep impression on his consciousness. He ridiculed his subconsciousness, his little-suspected powers of observation and interpretation. At the same time he frankly yielded to his awakened sense of caution, hiding back in the brush up a little gully.

He circled for three or four hours examining the country for tracks and signs. He found where the wolf pack had followed the north shore of the big lake, running true to form as they worked their paws in the crystal sands, spreading their claws to let the grains cut away the caked clay and polish their nails. They left the pond heading up a spur, following a game trail cut by ages of hooves and paws. At least two deer had been in the runway since the wolves ascended it in single file. When he found this the hour was too late for him to go far, but the following morning, with several good chunks of antelope meat ready cooked, Conklin traced the runway for miles until it led into a wide pass in the bottom of which were some acres of small evergreen timber in a narrow line clear over to the north side. The animal paths were higher and in the open valley above the timber line. The summit in this crossing was a good ten or eleven thousand feet above the sea level and probably eight thousand feet above the ranch outfit, some forty-odd miles to the southward.

And here in the runway worn by passing animals Conklin stood to stare at four .33-caliber brass shells where they had fallen on the ground when some hunter had emptied them firing at a victim he desired to kill. When Conklin picked up the brass tubes he found no stain on the under side. Their bright polish was undimmed. They would not ordinarily tarnish for weeks in this high, clear atmosphere. But drifting wind, passing beasts and the hard stony ground had all combined to hide the boot prints of the shooter—if he wore boots.

Over on the north side, well down the slope, Conklin found where some one had slipped in a wet springy place, as deer do, and left the print of a boot heel for nearly a foot in the clay-like muck. Farther down in another soft place was the track of heavy feet descending the steep grade. These were several weeks old. Conklin left no marks of his own laced boots, which he had worn in anticipation of running around on foot a good deal. He had the feeling that he had better cover his own traces.

More than two thousand feet below, beside a cascading brooklet, the pass runway led Conklin to a place where the hunter had stopped to build a fire only a few inches across. He had cooked something here. A spruce branch had been broken off and a roughly whittled gambrel stick with hair in the splintery end lay at the foot of a small tree.

"He got 'em!" Conklin said, scrutinizing the hair. "Why—That's a mountain sheep!"

A heavy fine and imprisonment was the penalty for shooting this game. This hunter was a wilderness cheater of the laws. Conklin had read the story that far. For the rest, he knew the wolves had not crossed the mountains but probably had kept to the south side of the Singing Birds, swinging toward the east. He built a long fire against an overhanging rock and on a bed of fine sand. When the sand was heated he threw armfuls of boughs on it, and then crawled into the heap, sleeping warm and sound all night long.

Soon after sunrise he was back over the

pass heading down to the old survey camp. And on the way he came into a blazed line along the side hill which he had not noticed on his way up. From its course he saw that it was a trap-line, and a few rods along it he found a trap-cubby. This was a pekan, or fisher, set. Possibly a lynx would pass that way; the location was where the big weasel relative was apt to pass by.

For a minute Conklin was nonplussed. He thought perhaps the man who had come to the top of the Singing Birds had this line blazed through here. But as he studied the course of the trail through the woods he saw that fresh cuts in the tree trunks marking the way had also old blaze marks on the same or intervening trees. When presently he came to a place soft enough to take the print of a foot he stopped short, thrilled.

That shapely moccasined foot was not the same as the booted foot of the long-striding man. Only one person could have been along this trail; he had come to the fur country of Pretty Shells. He followed the line a mile or more, but was obliged to leave it to cut down across to the old survey camp to find his horse.

When he had saddled again he headed for Boiling Sand ponds for he would have to tell Pretty Shells she had a neighbor to the north beyond the Singing Bird divide. That neighbor was questionable, though probably only a hunter.

Late in the afternoon he came to the head of the chain of little lakes. As he stopped at the outlet of the upper pond he saw where some one had jumped from a rock to a soft bank, scrambling in the dirt. Right at the brook side this big-footed man had blazed a tree with an ax. He had run a line down from the main divide toward the north and carried it southward as far as Conklin could see in the woods.

At sight of this he bristled angrily.

CHAPTER IV

A FUR-POCKET CLAIM-JUMPER

ORDINARILY the track of a man in deep wilderness is a matter of rejoicing for a woodsman coming upon it. Neighbors in loneliness are glad to drift together for a talk or to swap something. After long solitude in the back country human beings need the companionship of one another.

But Delos Conklin at the first glance read the intentions of the man in the fresh hacks of his trap-line ax on the trees. The stranger had come rough shod through the fur country which Pretty Shells owned under the usage of the trappers who can not in honor or safety trespass on one another's prior rights. His suspicions already awakened by the killing of a mountain sheep on the high Singing Birds, Conklin now instantly went looking for proof that this man knew he was invading another's territory.

Leaving his horse, Conklin started northward on the fresh blaze line. Within half an hour the newcomer was betrayed as a fur country bully. He had followed for more than a mile along the back of a ridge. There were the old blaze marks of Running Voice, the new and narrow slashes made by Pretty Shells with fresh gum in the wounds, and here were the hacking blows of the intruder all along the same ridge deer runway which served as a way through this marten-inhabited woods. Moreover the cubbies which Pretty Shells had reconstructed and made ready for bait and traps when the furs should be prime had been kicked down, the old chips scattered about and fresh boughs covering them trampled—warning to the woman, if the newcomer knew she was a woman—that he was going to take this region to be his own. He had carried his hacked line clear down to the edge of the timber line, thereby serving notice that he claimed all the south side of the Singing Bird timber belt.

Conklin, having made sure of what was taking place, immediately hastened on his way to the main cabin occupied by Pretty Shells. As her friend he angrily resented the attempt to run her out of the fur pocket which was hers by every right of the wilderness code. She had been here for years with her husband, learning the runways of the wild life and cutting traps-lines to the crossings of the pelage-wearers, building trap-cubbies at these places. Though she had been absent three years, she had been for weeks reclaiming the country, occupying the line cabins, and working over the old trap-pens and contrivances. Even if the scoundrel had meant no trespass, his destruction of the cubbies was a crime against the code of the fur country. The building of cubbies of his own was further proof of his criminal intent.

One new pen consisted of two large square pine-wood chips cut from a fallen tree which was partly punk. The tree stub made the back of the pen, and over the top had been thrown a small armful of green spruce boughs, some of which the builder had broken off himself, and some of which he had taken from the neatly cut boughs that Pretty Shells had used to cover the top of one of her reconstructed cubbies which he had destroyed.

A practised woodsman, a pretty able wildcrafter, had built the bait cabin, but his job had been carelessly done. His ax work had not been very accurate. His carelessness would be obvious to any observer. A hole at the back was large enough for a marten or white weasel to go through to the bait within without encountering the trigger-pan of the steel jaws.

The invasion unmistakably meant serious trouble for Pretty Shells. The intruder had been even more menacing than if he had shaken his fist in the woman's face, ordering her to leave. He had come intending to stay. As he might even now be approaching Pretty Shells' main cabin, Conklin made haste to go on.

From what he had already seen of the Singing Bird mountain timber Conklin knew it was a wonderful fur pocket, two thousand square miles in a belt along the face of the southern slope. From the top of the divide it was scores of miles to any mapped highway. The outlying Bell Brand was the nearest ranch outfit. And it was plain to Conklin that no one had trapped at least the south side of the range since Running Voice had been bushwhacked, three years previous. No wonder the green timber was alive with foxes, members of the weasel tribe, bears and the big wolves.

Wide game runways made it not too difficult for him to lead the horse down the south side of the several ponds to the shore of the cabin pond, the most beautiful of all the Boiling Sand chain. He found horse tracks at an inlet and found three of Pretty Shells' animals in a beaver meadow. These animals thus covered by their tracks his own invasion of the territory, and when he arrived near the cabin he tied his horse with habitual caution in a clump of second growth.

Of course he hailed from the lake shore when he was within a hundred yards of the fine stone structure. No answer returned to him. When he went nearer he could discern no smoke coming from the fireplace chimney. The mistress of the place was away, probably merely about her ordinary affairs. Having made sure of this, he pulled the latch-string to lift the bar of the rived and hewn plank door to enter.

The interior was fragrant with the mingled odors of mountain balsam and cedar. The table, the hard clay floor with its skin rugs, the walls with their dangling belts and bags of beads, the peeled yellow pole rafters, the halves of the split-log drain-off roof, the sunshine coming through the small south side windows, and the shelves with their table and kitchen-wares were all indicative of the excellent touch of a neat and orderly woman with a fine sense of beauty who had plenty of time to try the varied effects of pretty color contrasts and the arrangements of her simple but effective belongings.

In one corner was a wide bunk, the springs made of a network of rawhide ropes covered with a foot-deep compact layer of evergreen boughs from which came the most of the fragrance. On this was a large horse-hide which had been worked soft. The covering was of great Indian woven goat's-hair blankets with the conventional figures of many animals and glyphic shapes each with their meaning in the colors used. But sheets indicated the habit of most civilized homes.

It was the kind of a house in which one instinctively takes off his hat. Conklin stood with his crumpled in his hand as he looked around at the charming good taste of everything. His eyes rested a long time on the books which the Carlisle girl had brought with her. Open on the table was a volume devoted to lichens and mosses. And a piece of broken wood covered with a tiny forest of fibers, with red and yellow flags, revealed to him that Pretty Shells had been trying to find the name of this bit of wilderness that had grown on some fallen tree. She had left it for another time.

Conklin was embarrassed. He thoroughly minded his own business. He had expected to give this cabin a wide berth rather than have his passing that way misunderstood. He reached for his little note-book and pencil to leave word of warning, or rather information, but if that overeager and unscrupulous trail-maker should come this way he would surely find the message if it was left in any conspicuous place.

"She's probably out around somewhere," he thought to himself, "I'd really better talk to her. But perhaps she won't come in till late day. I'm in a hurry to get to the ranch—"

So he told himself. But he knew he was in a hurry to do no such thing. He wanted to see the widow. Her smile had illuminated the whole Bell Brand outfit. In all the region none was quite like her, quite the same in repute, in interest, in wonder and in charm. When she had taken her departure to this way back place it was as though the chandelier of a great room had been extinguished leaving only the invisible reflector lights around the walls to cast a pale glow. It had been a relief to leave the loneliness of the ranch buildings to look for wolves in their dens after she had taken her departure.

Men who dwell much alone are keenly appreciative of the feminine presence. In Conklin's feelings there was sincere regard for the grave and handsome woman. He had, indeed, given the poor devils of underdeveloped humans straight talk on the way they were to treat Pretty Shells and without raising his fist or drawing his gun he had explained unmistakably to the riders who were at fault the immeasurable benefit to themselves in treating her—in treating every woman and man—right, not cheating, bullying, insulting any one.

"That's so— You bet it is!" Park Cable, one of the cowboys, had acknowledged when he saw the point. "We get the idea, exactly!"

So it happened that the widow found her relations with the hard-bitted Bell Brand crew on an entirely satisfactory basis and she had few slips or breaks with which to contend. She had been welcome always, and presently she had outgrown the habit of carrying a knife ready in its sheath, hidden in her garments.

It was noon and Conklin was hungry. There was lots of grub in the tins, nettings, on shelves and hanging from the beams. He went to the fireplace, and found it swept clean and the stones cold. At the same time whittled kindlings and armfuls of wood were ready for the owner's return or the needs of a passer-by, should either arrive in a rain or a cold wind or dead tired.

The visitor fidgeted for an hour, looking around, waiting and arguing with himself. He finally built a fire, brought a pail of water and slabbed off a streak of venison which was in a big cooler over the bubbling spring which supplied the cabin. He cooked a delicious meal, including Dutch oven hot bread, and a cup of coffee with condensed cream from an open can—which indicated the early return of Pretty Shells.

He went out to look around, after he had cleaned the frying-pan and washed the dishes, but when he had smoked he again entered the cabin to read some of the paragraphs in the books. He found the print blurred in his eyes. He had been riding so long in the deserts that his lenses had flattened, dimming his close-up vision. As he knew the phenomenon he rubbed his eyes and looked for coarser print.

The afternoon was well gone before he realized the rapidity of the time's passing. He was startled to discover the sun was low enough for the west end trees to cast their shadow half the length of the lake. He was rigid with attention when he heard footsteps crunching in the gravel at the top of the beach and he caught a glimpse of a lank, shaggy man coming with long strides toward the front of the cabin, rifle in hand and outflaring holster on his hip.

The glimpse was enough. That fellow was bad. A rider of the cattle country in the far back wilderness edge may be caught unawares, but give him two seconds and his balance is recovered. The bearing, the rush and the appearance of the scoundrel were unmistakable.

The door was closed. The warmth of the fire had beguiled Conklin into basking before it. He stood around to the left as he faced the door which would swing open in the direction which would put a right-hand man badly at a disadvantage on the question of a draw—but this newcomer's gun was on his left hip with a fast-draw Cheyenne holster, a detail Conklin had noticed with interest, for it meant a left-handed man.

A heavy shoulder crashed against the plank door, which did not give.

"Open that door, you!" a high, ridiculously inadequate voice squealed angrily. "Open it, you squaw! Open it or I'll come through with the ax!"

The latch-string which lifted the long heavy bar had somehow fallen in, locking the entrance as Conklin recognized now.

He was surprized, for he had not noticed that. However, he grinned as he darted noiselessly to the door and threw it wide.

He stepped out with his own .45-caliber revolver poked against the lower end of the invader's breastbone.

"Well?" Conklin demanded. "What did you say? Call me an Indian—a squaw? Who do you think you are, anyhow?"

The bony face of the fellow opened so wide as to display his remaining assortment of yellow and blackened teeth. His face was lean, weathered and misshapen, covered with reddish-gray whiskers, his nose exceedingly long and twisted, his eyes like cold moons in their milky purple glow.

He backed away, swallowing violently and his face splotching with white and red, surprize, fear, rage mingled in his expression, and his hands like some dirty poison fish of the tropic seas opening wide as he raised them in reluctant surrender, dropping his heavy rifle as he backed away.

"Who you talking to, calling *me* a squaw?" Conklin demanded.

"This—this *your* outfit?" the man blinked, looking around, gasping for breath. "This yourn?"

"Of course it is, you fur-pocket-jumper! Why the Hades are you blazing your trail down this side the Singing Bird range?"

"Why— Why this'ns my line country— You ain't no—"

"None of that!" Conklin declared. "The old Running Voice trap-lines and cabins go with this main cabin. There they lie— They cover all this side the mountains with old and new blazes. You've been showing your snoot this side the divide, and you've come once too often. You came down off the Middle Pass east of the high peaks this morning. You crossed the connecting inlet above this Falling Leaves lake and cut along the outlying ridge through the marten country. Then you came in on the wagon tracks I brought my supplies on from Bell Brand ranch. And when you got here you called me a squaw. Did you think you could call a man that and get away with it? By Gad, you get down on your knees and pray— Calling me a squaw— Heh!"

"I— I didn't mean nothing—"

"You lie! You threw a bluff and I called you. Get down and beg my pardon, you fox-headed, shedding, claim-jumping hill-billy!"

The fellow dropped on his knees.

"I didn't mean no harm—"

"You lie— What did you mean?"

"Why I— I heard something— Somebody was here trapping—and I didn't want nobody scaring my wolves—"

"Your wolves!"

"Yeh—" The fellow scrambled to his feet again. "You know yerself 'taint legal comin' into another fellow's trappin'—"

"What you doing here, then!"

"I be'n in these mountains a long time, off'n'on— They're mine."

"You never ran a line this side the main divide, now did you?"

"I intended to this fall—"

"And when you heard I'd taken over Running Voice's outfit from his widow, you come hell-whooping sneaking over to blaze it ahead of me; that it?"

The man nodded. He was too badly shaken by surprize to argue.

"How about it— Peace or war?"

The fellow's face twitched and his jaw worked. His eyes turned and searched the far side of the pond and up the slope of the Singing Bird, which, grown to tall green forest trees, extended to the timber line and the deep V-slot of the middle pass.

"I ain't lookin' fer tr'uble, Mister— Mister—"

"Conklin's my name— Yours?"

"Why—mine's—mine's Redding, Tom Redding."

He turned his cunning face to take sidelong glances at Conklin. He was lying. He was blinking in his anxiety, though. He was showing signs of a greater fear than even in the first start backward when he found himself jabbed by a man's revolver instead of facing a frightened young woman.

"Turn your back and drop your belt," Conklin ordered coldly.

"Now say, old man—I—" Redding's eyes opened wide.

The scoundrel was really pleading, now. Death had worried him as he found it imminent. But he was terror-stricken as he was ordered to give himself up, completely.

"What's aching you?" Conklin asked, suddenly.

"Why—why—" the man wiped his sweating forehead on a red and bony wrist.

"Reckon you're on the prod—scouting?" Conklin suggested.

The man nodded, beginning to unbuckle the revolver and rifle cartridge belt.

"I don't expect that's any of my business," Conklin said. "I don't care a whoop where you ride, if you keep out of this side the main ridge of the Singing Birds. How about it?"

"I'll pull my freight sure pop!" the man exclaimed, catching his breath in anxious, unbelieving hope.

"All right—I'm not hunting rewards on humans. Any wolves this side the summit are mine, though. When they cross to yon side, they're yours. How's that?"

"Yes, sir— All right."

"Then it's settled. Your move!"

Redding stooped to pick up his rifle. He had on his back a small summer elk-hair hide pack out of which stuck the handle of a short trap-line ax. As he seized the rifle he glanced around to find that the revolver still covered him. He straightened and headed toward the lake outlet, striding in the sand, his laced boots the soles of which were patched with rawhide leaving a plain trail. He jumped from rock to rock across the shallows at the foot of the pond and two or three times looked back with quick glances like a fugitive animal.

Sunset had fallen. Gloom of twilight was already in the woods. The trapper was unquestionably a fugitive from justice. To his lawlessness was added the furtive habit of treachery, if Conklin was any judge of men. At the same time he had the feeling that the matter of the trapping privilege south of the Singing Bird divide was settled. At least, it was for the present.

He watched the colors of the sunset in the sky, and as they reflected among the shadows of the trees and their deep shades that were lifelike on the glossy, unwrinkled surface of the lake. He was still staring, nearly oblivious, when the stars cast their gleams out of the western horizon to replace the sun's last faintest rays.

The air was stinging with the high altitude and early autumn. He was tired, sweaty with the intense strain of his encounter and the long day's tracking through the forest leading his loaded horse. He hesitated to remain in the stone cabin. Any moment, he thought, Pretty Shells would return. He was sure he would have some difficulty in explaining his presence there. She might even think he was lying about it.

He went out to where he had left his outfit, brought in his big cowboy tarpaulin, and its woolen blankets. He carried these to the cabin, entered and started another fire. He found animal-oil lamps, wicks twisted from loose cotton and sucking the oil to feed the flames as they burned. He lighted two of these and started a good fire; then prepared a meal to assuage his hearty appetite.

The absence of the cabin owner puzzled him. He laughed at his own stupidity as after a time he went around to the scalp-bark shed. When he lighted a match he confirmed his inspiration.

Pretty Shells' saddle and pack-saddle, blankets and bridle, halter, tether rope and lariat were all gone. That accounted for the fact that not all her animals were in the beaver meadow pasture. She had gone riding, probably back to the Bell Brand ranch after more supplies which she must bring in before the fall of winter snows. She would probably stay away several days. He was sorry he had not seen her at the ranch, but as he rolled up in his blanket on a bearskin before the open fireplace, he was very thankful indeed that he had been at the cabin when the fellow who lied when he called himself Tom Redding had come, expecting to find her alone in this lonesome land.

CHAPTER V

WOOL-HEAD GOES COURTING

PRETTY SHELLS found that after all she was quite a timid woman. The strange man who had come out of the woods on Trembling Leaves pond to drink of its clear cold water startled her. Intuition gave her warning. The man, though he was a long way from her, revealed his furtive and questionable habit of thought when he so quickly quenched his thirst and returned into the dark shadows out of sight. She had not anticipated having any other humans on that far-back mountain chain slope. The gossip of the cattle range was that the Singing Birds were unoccupied by any human being.

She did not fear wolves or cinnamon bears. For cougars she had a woman's contempt. She had lived in cabins far back in the Rockies and out on desert rims. She was also familiar with people, having for a time after graduating from the famous Indian school at Carlisle answered the calls coming to Central in the village of Wishaka.

When she married she was glad to go into far-back forests again to have her own thoughts. And after the hard toil of the cattle ranch she again sought refuge from surrounding humans in order to have a real perspective on the arts of living as she had known them.

The presence of one stranger in all this timber belt disturbed her. When she had given the subject thought, keeping watch with her knife once more in a fold of her shirt and her revolver, a .32-20 caliber, hanging heavily from her waist, she decided she would now return to the Bell Brand ranch in order to inquire whether any one was living in the country she had claimed for her own. She needed supplies, more dried fruit and corn-meal, roots and other staples.

Accordingly she started early on the following morning. As her horses were light, she arrived before night at the Bell Brand, finding a welcome which brought a deep red to her round creamy cheeks and a gay smile to her lips. Wool-Head's welcome could have been heard a mile. The cowboys cheered her. Pasty Face Begane emerged from the kitchen and, with his hands ragged with shreds of dough, he demanded that she inform him how the Hades she had ever stood so long the ingratitude and unappeased hunger of such a gang of bottomless pits as these scoundrels anyhow.

"You say they eat all you cook and cry for more?" she asked him.

"Yeh—hot bread, pies, bushels of 'taters, and whole cows to a whack!"

"Could they pay you a higher compliment—praise you more sincerely than by eating so much?" she demanded. "Oh—they used to leave things of mine uneaten, you know! It nearly broke my heart—"

"What!" the cowboys and Wool-Head shouted, "you say we didn't eat—"

They stopped short. Pasty Face beamed with delight and pride. The boys grinned. She won the heart of her successor while she teased them all in her playful way.

When she swung down from her saddle all hands sprang for the honor of taking off the harness and driving the three animals down to feed in the alfalfa. And later, sitting at the table where she had so often served, with Pasty Face bringing in for her his choicest pieces and his prettiest cakes, she warmed all their hearts and filled great vacancies in their famished souls talking to each, neglecting not one of them. And after supper they all sat around the big fireplace in the big house where she told them what she had been doing.

"I have been over the old trap-lines," she said. "Fur is plenty. I have fished, smoking more than enough. I have hung up plenty of jerky and you would be surprized to see how well I have furnished my cabin for the winter. I have shaped snowshoe bows, and have stretched webbing strings many times. That, you know, is the secret of plaiting a rawhide rope so it will not stretch when it is wet. Soak the string, stretch it with a heavy weight till it is dry and then soak and stretch again. When the strings have been stretched many times, eight or ten, even if they are soaked by damp snow they will not more than spring a little under one's weight on the webbing."

"Well, dog-gone!" Wool-Head exploded. "I never knowed how you kept those ropes from stretching!"

When she had talked a long while, feeding their curiosity about her whimsical adventure, one of them asked—

"But don't you get scairt up, some?"

"Yes, I've been frightened," she admitted. "At first I feared the silence and the loneliness. I loved it, though. The squirrel came to talk to me on my door sill. A porcupine lives in the trees and rocks just over on the lower ridge from my cabin. I do not harm him, but caught another at a distance to whom I apologized for taking his quills and skin. Owls are often around in the night. Magpies and jays come frequently to pass the time of day and make their jokes. They have been afraid of me, which is a disgrace. No beautiful bird should fear any human, you know. I hung shreds of meat on bones in trees around my cabin. These they regard with suspicion. While the flock eats, one or other of the birds is always on the lookout. I had not thought of that before. They know danger. They do not like humans. And yesterday a man, tall, slim and a stranger came to the lake where he drank of the clear water. I did not know him. He said nothing to me. Perhaps he does not even know my cabin lies screened in the brake across the pond. So—well, I came out for supplies."

"Why—Sho! There ain't a man in all this country would harm you, Pretty Shells!" Wool-Head growled heartily.

"But some one shot my husband, Running Voice," she said. "Could greater harm been done me?"

"Well, shucks!" the rancher exclaimed. "Prob'ly he mout of been 'zasperated finding you all was married!"

She laughed through her tears. She was stricken by the compliment, yet pleased by its humorous and tragic sincerity. In the quiet that ensued she presently turned to Wool-Head.

"It's none of my business," she began, politely, "but I am wondering about Delos Conklin. Has he gone away? You've said nothing about him, and he is not here. I ask—well, because I miss him."

"Conklin? I asked him to go riding to find where Lop-Ear hangs out with his band —that's all!" Wool Head exclaimed.

"Oh—after the wolves?" she cried, relieved. "I'm glad of that. He knows the lives of many animals. He told me some things he had learned, not only as he saw them but as he read them in books. Did you know that Lop-Ear includes the Singing Bird Mountains in his range? Just the other day he came to my own Trembling Leaves pond, driving a deer ahead of him. The game plunged into the lake to swim across. Some of the wolves followed in the water, but others circled around along the beach, taking long leaps in the hard wet sand at the water's edge. They struck the buck at the landing, killing and eating him. Oh, they're a savage band!"

"Conklin's tracking them. He took after them the next morning after they came through here last week," the rancher said.

"He'll hang to 'em, too!" Park Cable suggested.

"He never lets go," another chimed in.

"Then if—but he couldn't catch up with them!" she said. "They travel too fast."

"And nobody knows where they'll hit next!" Plack shook his shaggy head. "They've an awful big hunting country, from the Needle Tops clear 'cross beyond the Sparkling Dawns!"

"And up to the timber line of the Singing Birds, too!" Pretty Shells mused. "They're sure bad killers. No other wolves like them around."

"They're all murderin' brutes!" Park Cable shook his head, which was of good shape though his face was hard as granite in its expression.

"I've seen tracks of other wolves in my country." The breed widow shook her head thoughtfully. "Some hunt along the lake shore, finding fish. They work through the briers and brush, too, eating berries and pawing up roots. Perhaps in winter, when the snow is deep, they all hunt meat. But in summer a good many of them do not kill, at least not so much."

"A wolf's a wolf!" Wool-Head shook his head, dissenting.

Pretty Shells did not argue the matter. The hour was late. The cowboys had been working hard, beginning the round-up of scatterings and doing some belated branding. The tinkle on a quarter-hour warned them that it was nine fifteen o'clock by the ornate timepiece.

"I'm resignin' the cook's bed, right here!" Pasty Face Begane declared, but the visitor shook her head, rising to join the two kitchen help women in the log cabin Wool-Head had built for women hands.

"Good night, boys!" she waved to them.

When the three women had left, the crew sat for a time in breathing silence, thinking of many things not one would have admitted or told for worlds. Hard men, a man-killer or two, wanderers of the cow country pastures and swagger—still they could not wholly stifle the voices out of their more or less distant pasts which the pleasant voice of the visitor had summoned like echoes reverberating in their thoughts. With an effort, vigorous and even accompanied by angry oaths crowding at their teeth, they one by one went seeking their own bunks. Wool-Head filled his pipe again, stretched out his feet toward the fireplace, and leaned back to such visions and imaginings as burly giant of the sage and alkali entertains as he contemplates his own ascent out of meager and nearly hopeless beginnings.

"He'p yourself!" Wool-Head told Pretty Shells when she explained her needs, "but I'm goin' to drive to town tomorrow mornin'. Them ribbons you was asking about, an' silk threads, I happens to be out of, just now."

Both laughed. All day long she had the ranch pretty much to herself. The storehouse was full of the grub she needed. But she was glad to take the long buck-board ride into Tribulation beyond the Sparkling Dawns. The water can rattled and plunked as the wheels clattered over the gravel washes and the horseshoes clinked as the animals romped along.

"Been lookin' for an excuse to go fetch the mail," Wool-Head told his companion who sat beneath his big elbow on his left. "Mout not've fetched it till we drove our shipper beeves out. Y'know, 'f a man don't watch out, he gits so's he don't know how t' act when he does hit town. I got thataway onct myself, back yonder a while. I was so blamed busy on the ranch, tending cattle, whalin' jack-rabbits out'n the alfalfy and just putterin' around that I didn't get out from trailing beef out to ship one fall to the next. I said then I'd never go that long again. Why, you know, when I come to go buy a drink I felt so blamed modest I walked clear from the plaza out to the livery stable an' back 'fore I could git myself bullied up to go in an' call f'r a whisky. Now, y' know, a man hadn't ought to stay out'n the alkali an' sage as long as that, so he feels all het up just buying a drink, had he?"

"He certainly ought not to!" she admitted gravely. "I didn't suppose you were afraid of anything!"

"Well, I am," he sighed. "Mebbe you know Mis' Forbes?"

"You mean—the Tribulation dressmaker?"

"Exactly." He wet his lips, cracked his whip and hitched himself a little. "First time I see her her head was over a saddle—the piebald mare Hank Spall rides around so much. She was bare headed, you know, an' seein's her hair's red I couldn't of missed seein' it, no more'n I could a fire on the prairie round my ranch. An' then she stepped out, no bigger'n lots of little gals. I bet she wouldn't dress a hundred an' ten-twelve pounds. If I was a brave man I'd ast that woman to marry me. Why, she could sit on one hand of mine, you know't? She could. I cain't never git her out my mind. She sticks into it, honest she does, Pretty Shells! How the Hades does a woman git herse'f into some thick skull like mine, worryin' an' botherin' the life out of me, interferin' with my projects the way she does? I'll be ridin' along, an' by gosh, first thing I know I ain't tendin' to business a-tall, but seein' that blamed little red head wallopin' all through my head, as though I hadn't enough in it and on it 'thout no pesky woman interferin' with my rightful idees. How do they do it? Is it d'liberate, d'you expect? What d'ye say, Pretty Shells? You're a woman. You ought to know, having be'n married."

"Why—some women do it on purpose," she answered. "Some don't. If a woman is mean, she goes out of her way to steal the attention of men. But again—sometimes—well, she doesn't intend to make trouble for any man in his heart. She—she probably wishes she could make everybody happy. I shouldn't be surprized if Mrs. Forbes would be immensely pleased if she knew you—you dreamed about her."

"She would—me?"

"I saw her watching you last spring, when we all went to town. I'm sure, if you told her you were always thinking about her she wouldn't mind. Instead, she would be surprized. She would just look up at you and catch hold of her hands."

"Yes—yes— Then what?"

"If you didn't say anything more I'm sure she'd cry all night on her pillow."

"What! What you driving at?"

"Of course if you said all that, and then didn't ask her to marry you, she'd be disappointed. I'm sure her heart would break, Wool-Head!"

"Her heart'd break—" the big fellow swallowed violently—"if I didn't ast her to marry me. My gawd— Why? You don't mean she wants me to."

"I'm not sure—but I shouldn't be surprized a bit!"

"Then she'd laugh an' make fun of me!" he exploded.

"I don't think so," Pretty Shells dissented. "I'm sure she wouldn't. You know, I boarded with her when they had the inquest after my husband was killed. Oh, she was kind, Wool-Head! She has an awful temper—I don't mean any harm. She's lots of spunk, I ought to say. But she wouldn't hurt any one. Especially she wouldn't hurt you. Anyhow, you might take a chance."

"Why—dog-gone—" he grumbled and rumbled in his throat as he whirled his whip of many coils, snapping it, asking at last, "Say, now, mebbe you'd kind of sound her out—"

"No, that wouldn't be right," the widow refused. "I'd sooner go tell 'Pigface' Clobes you had sent me to buy him a drink of liquor than to tell Amelia Forbes you're afraid to tell her her picture is always branded in your heart, and that you love her!"

"That's good sense," the rancher nodded. "You always did have good sense. I'll bet

Running Voice is lonely where he is now, for what could the Happy Hunting Grounds be for him without you?"

"Oh!" she choked. "You've been good to me, Wool-Head. You've all been—I can't tell you what it has meant! You and Conklin and—"

"Nobody'd be'n safe from the others, if he hadn't," Wool Head chuckled.

Beyond the Wagon Pass through the Sparkling Dawns the two came to where they could see the Shake-Down trail leading across another valley to the little checkerboard town of Tribulation. No one could explain the organization of the county seat at such a place, except that it may have been somebody's hope that its mineral sulphur and soda springs would entice health seekers to such an arid center. But there it was, organized and with stores for traders, a court-house for lawyers and outlaws, entertainment for the visitors and some temptations, some troubles and a surprizing record of killings, justified and otherwise.

When the two arrived Pretty Shells took her hand bag and shook the dust from her clothes as they stopped at the livery corral and stable. Wool Head reached a beseeching hand to restrain her while he gave orders about the graining and feeding of his beasts.

"Hold on, now!" he begged her, "just a minute! I want to ask you something."

And in a low, intense voice, as they headed toward the plaza center of town, he pleaded for reassurance that what he had in mind would be all right, and the red-top lady who would weigh something more than a third as much as he did surely wouldn't be offended and hurt him?

"Wool-Head," the widow laughed, "every woman in the world worth having, worth loving, knows the greatest compliment a man can pay her is always to have her in his mind. And if he asks her to marry him, if she doesn't appreciate the compliment why should he do anything but pity her?"

"Phew!" he sighed, wiped his brow beneath the rim of his exorbitant hat, "if it was only you I was figuring about—which I'd be'n considerin' if I had any say in the project—I wouldn't feel so dad-blamed worried. But Amelia Forbes—I don't know—"

"Run along!" Pretty Shells laughed. "Get it over with. She'll surely be home. Probably she'll be alone. If you find any one there, just shoo them out, sayin' you've something important to say to her, personal, confidential and in a hurry. I know it'll be all right."

Wool-Head Dan Plack strode on through the business section of false-front stores, board or stone walks and tie rails along the roadway. Mrs. Forbes's house was a hundred yards beyond the plaza and the breed widow stood watching the huge man stride on remarkably light feet, with his courage mustered in the direction of his fate. In front of the two-story frame building Wool Head paused to pull himself together. He drew his belt up a notch. He drew his hat more firmly down upon his head, as if he was facing a storm. Then leaning to the gale of his emotions, he headed for the front door over the top of which appeared in neat gold letters on a black ground:

MODES & BOARD

Down the light breeze came the sound of clattering as the rancher's fist whacked the boards of the front wall, not realizing the noise he was making in his perturbation of mustered energies. The door opened. The watcher had a glimpse of beautiful dark copper hair and a figure small and as graceful as a girl's standing against the door-jamb. Then he stooped to enter, lifting his hat with both his hands.

Pretty Shells smiled whimsically. Her eyes blinked, too, for she conceived not only the joy that was in that house, but also the pathos of it. The long ride had been something of a strain. She was curious about the outcome of the romance, having a woman's interest in the affair. She dreamed a minute as she collected her own thoughts to do her shopping for knickknacks before night should fall.

Then she heard the distant tinkling of shattering glass. She glanced quickly and saw something bursting through the front of the house of the widow Mrs. Amelia Forbes. Fragments of several window panes flashed as they turned in the late afternoon sunshine. A crumpled-up figure of a man straightened out in mid-air and came down scrambling on all fours to roll over in the dust—a man of medium size in a dark gray suit.

Leaning out of the window whose framing had all been burst outward the several spectators along the street, which had been quiet with the coming of the day's end, saw the head of a huge man extended on a barrel of a leather-coated body as he surveyed the ejected fellow who was rising to his feet to burst into a run. Every onlooker recognized the inarticulate roar of anger with which big Wool-Head Dan Plack bade the previous visitor begone.

And then all the spectators saw a shining coppery red head ascending the sloping back of the gigantic rancher. His roar broke into a choking gurgle of excited bewilderment as two hands on the ends of slim white arms took good holds in his shaggy hair and a shrill, feminine and indignant voice took the place of the husky masculine roar.

"Good gracious!" Pretty Shells gasped to herself. "The old fool's gone and shooed the other fellow out!"

She stood leaning against an awning post staring helplessly at the scene up the street. Amelia Forbes, red-haired widow, was perched on the shoulders of the big fellow in the window, digging in her knees and her clear voice carrying with distinction through the thin air of the county seat.

And then the rancher backed into the room out of sight, but not until Pretty Shells, at any rate, saw one of his big hands reaching up and backward as it might have gone to seize a wildcat perched upon his back. With difficulty, Pretty Shells saved herself from shrieking hysterics.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUARRY SHOWS ITSELF

DELOS CONKLIN awakened between dawn and sunrise on the morning after he had confronted the gaunt and evil-hearted wretch who called himself Tom Redding. Conklin used his safety razor on his soft skin and thin pale beard. He breakfasted when he was clean and bathed. He caught his beaver-meadow-pastured horse and one of Pretty Shells' to borrow it for the packing to the Bell Brand ranch. She would be glad he had taken the animal, he knew. He left a note telling what he had done, however, and said he was going to trap especially for Lop-Ear and his outlaw band of wolves. He made sure that what he wrote would give no inkling to Redding of the true situation should the scoundrel come sneaking back.

"In case you come this way," Conklin began his note. He added a plain warning, "Look out for a lank fellow claiming to be Tom Redding and who blazed a fresh line past the head of the third pond up the chain."

With some reluctance, a feeling of sadness, he turned his back on the stone cabin in its beautiful surroundings. He had confronted a deadly serious problem there for sake of the woman who preferred to dwell alone in the fastnesses of wilderness. Her cabin was full of the spirit of her gentleness and love of trees, birds, flowers and sunlit places. At the same time he knew that she went about her hunting and fishing with something of the precision of a Priestess of Baal, or the emotion of an Indian dancing one of the tribal sacrifices. She killed game, caught fur-bearers and even took a beautiful bird in order to use its bright feathers for some feat of embroidery. But he suspected that she followed secretly, so that no man should know it, the ancient Indian custom of apologizing to each victim and feeling genuine sorrow for the necessity. This was the impression he had from her cabin, its furnishings and the splendor of its setting.

He rode down the grade which had permitted the ascent of the heavy ranch supply-wagon. He saw, from the lower timber line, the desert that extended to a horizon more than a hundred miles distant. And what seemed to be only a short part of the whole lay between him and his destination, resting like a child's play-ranch around the slope against the side-hill of the Sparkling Dawns. But for all his steady plodding it would be late when he reached the Bell Brand outfit.

He stopped for a minute still in the forest shade to gaze at the enormous valley. He would never forget the scene, for it was in the prevailing sunshine just a huge gem sunk by unimaginable art of cloudbursts and tender winds in the face of a crystalline earth. To east and west he saw mesa-tablelands the tops of which marked the highlands that had been. Ages of floods had washed down the valley, carrying away the mile and more depth of stones and clays. And the floor of the basin had been polished by the passing down the line of the light feet of the whirling winds who gave the Flats their name of the Dancing Maids.

As he stood there a motion to the left caught his eye. He turned to discover a lift of tawny dust like the puff of cigaret smoke over in the east where the Sparkling Dawns ran down into the valley-pass and the sunrise end of the Singing Bird range began the ascent into the noble green darkness of the timber belt. Other tufts of agitation indicated something on the run, but so far away that even his excellent and accustomed eyes could see only the smoke of the motion.

Conklin watched, puzzled. He could only surmise how many miles away it was to that posse of the wilds. It might really be coming horsemen stretched out in single file following a sheriff. He presently could tell as they drew nearer that there were four or five or six of these running wraiths. He could distinguish the trembling blackness of creatures which, no matter how far away they were, how tiny their impression in that vast background had the spirit of being alive—very much alive as they raced. The observer sat down to watch. He was aware of a spectacle he might never see again. There was tumult in that bit of spirited romp. He knew, after a time, that these were not humans on horseback, but beasts, and presently he was on his toes and breathless for excitement as he questioned. Could this be Lop-Ear's savage raiders riding the slope of the valley bound for home over at the dens above the Needle Tops? And then he could see them clearly.

There were six of them. They were trailing along fifty or sixty yards apart. They were plunging along swiftly, yet in their gait was a something which despite their speed indicated their weariness. They were running on their nerve, some wrath darkening their bloody and immediate past. The sun had risen on their crimes, perhaps catching them unawares. If ever any one saw a criminal band making their getaway it was Delos Conklin as he watched the lobos scurrying by, with now and then a low, shrill, and in the brilliance of the desert, musical whimpering yelp, first one brute and then another, a huge, brawny and pale giant bringing up the rear as he lumbered along.

Lop-Ear was in the lead, his head down. Next behind romped the slim black female who kept her graceful looks as she sailed along, either unwearied or refusing to display her fatigue. Behind her ran the sleek, slim half-blood wolf and greyhound taking a half greater length of leaps than any of the others but coming down too heavily, tired on his long slim legs. Two young ones, though full grown, whined by, their whimperings nearly constant as they followed. The biggest of all had begun to lose his pace. He was dropping behind a little. He had more strength, probably, than any two of the others but he hadn't the endurance in the same proportion. He limped at times as his sore paws, cut by the crystal sands, stung him. And after the amazing procession had gone by Conklin saw the big brute swing up the grade, quitting to find rest in the grateful shade of the timber belt canopy.

Men lose their own intentions in the immensity of spectacles. Here was Delos Conklin hunting these scoundrel wolves. Prodding against his elbow was the butt of his adequate rifle. He watched the wolf band come to the wagon tracks that came up the slope on their way to and from Trembling Leaves pond. He stood tense with interest as he wondered what they would do at that track of humans.

Lop-Ear came as if he did not notice the ruts in the gravel and sand, but at the jump when the next would land him between the marks of the tires and amid the punches of the horse hooves in the loose ground, the leader flung himself with all his might five or six feet in the air and clear over the trail which might perhaps contain some deadly human agency of destruction for lupine raiders. The she-black rose with airy nonchalance of a gay jack-rabbit and outjumped Lop-Ear by two yards. The greyhound breed made a beautiful take-off but came down weakly, fell, rolled over and squealed and then sprang to his feet again to sprawl painfully onward. And finally the pale and burly giant in the rear did not notice what was ahead but landed between the tire ruts, uttered a bellowing yelp of dismay and flung himself in a panic of awkward weariness and fear to be on his way again, having scrambled about with all four paws among the horse and wagon tracks.

Conklin hesitated to shoot. No marksman had much chance of hitting any of them, since they bulked so small in the greatness of that land. The zip of the bullets would but add to their suspicions and experience. He could better afford to give over this chance than improve their ability to escape him later, when he foresaw he should be set to the task of overcoming their great native cunning, developed by the failure of their enemies quite to outwit them. Never does a hunter show his ability and foresight quite so well as when he abides in shrewd patience the temptation to alarm game in futile gambles against the odds of Fortune. There would be a definite letdown in the fears the wolves had for human tracks and trails because the big fellow had blundered into the wagon ruts without coming to any harm other than rasped nerves. Some other time these outlaws might be persuaded themselves to take a chance—to their own discomfiture—if now the hunter let them go past with no idea that they had been watched at that crossing.

Conkling resumed his march to the Bell Brand ranch. He had seen clearly the killer pack, a fact to help his imagination estimate the individuals. He knew his quarry all by sight. When he came to the place where the six wolves crossed the roadway he stopped, of course, to identify the tracks of the individual animals, making doubly sure of their respective size, peculiarities, signs by which to identify them. He spent thus a good hour, one of the richest in all his years of observation in reading the book of Nature.

Then he went on down into the desolate valley. At intervals he sponged the mouths of his horses, taking a few swallows of water himself. The distance was great, the footing generally soft and difficult. In the wastes the mirage played havoc with the realities. The roadway ahead was at times lost in oceans or dream cities. Had he believed his own eyes, he would have turned aside to avoid chasms or climbs over mountains so enormous as to baffle the most intrepid. But he kept to the safe way between the two wagon ruts and in the rose and purple of sunset he saw a castled pyramid whose walls were pearl and windows emerald, foundations gold and silver resolve itself into the cabins and corral of the Bell Brand outfit as he knew it would, and there he removed the saddles from the horses, whacked his hat on his bat-wing chaps and sniffed toward the cook's house.

"Howdy," one of the cowboys greeted him as he came up to join in the wash.

"Howdy," he replied, hanging up his sombrero.

"Find them danged wolfs?" Park Cable inquired.

"I reckon so-o!" Conklin replied. "Dens over to the north end of the Needle Tops. Big washed-down broken country and bad lands there. They're gawd-awful travelers, though."

"We be'n dragging down b'low in the Sparkling Dawn draws and cañons. That blamed scoundrel's pack went through theh couple days ago, killing two heifers an' five babies that we found. Didn't hardly more'n taste the big beef. They're bad, I tell yah!"

"You bet!"

"My gawd, I'd like to get a good whack at them anywhere within eighty rods. I could sure strip 'em at three hundred yards—I know't, if I had half a chanct."

"You bet," Conklin sighed, "but a man don't have shots like that—not when he's prepared'n ready."

"Tha's so."

"If they went beyond the Sparkling Dawns, they've come back," Conklin observed. "I saw their tracks, where they crossed the wagon trail and Pretty Shells's road. Heading west again, for home. She's come out—to stay?"

"No, ——!" two or three remarked, disgustedly, "just after some silk thread an' ribbons. Huh! The big feller's drove her over to Tribulation excusing himself to git his mail."

"I bet the president, two bunco steerers, a subscription agency and a chanct to draw a wife to a marriage agency have all writ to him, that's what I bet. Things like that can't wait, y' know."

"Nope. He lookin' for a wife?"

"I don't expect. Somebody sent in his name's a prospect, though, a while back. That's what the president'd be writin' him about. You see, he's sure mad and embarrassed, when he gits his matrimonial chances by mail. They got him down as a real he-man, kind, gentle, e-mensely rich in lands and cows, and lonely f'r congenial company. The tempacher of the pos' office raises with his embarrassment an' indignation. He can't say a word, though, account of he is a bachelor, he's rich, and they mis-call him, but not libelous, as gentle. Wouldn't yo' like to see'm proposin' to that red-haired spit-fire—what's her name'?—over to Tribulation?"

"You mean Mrs. Forbes? Say, you

know, I seen her call down Sheriff Dexter, one day. She don't look so big, she ain't so wide as some, but she sure has voice. I 'member one time, over on the K—B, they was a most awful bull bellowing around nights. We figured that bull'd weigh eighteen hundred an' have horns nine foot from tip to tip. Well, one day we atchewly seen who made all that noise. It was a little undersized runt of a crooked back three-year-old bull that no beef buyer'd leave in the cut. He had more voice'n all the rest the bulls put together. Lucky for him he could run, though. He sweat off two hundred pounds from the big King bull, being chased by him. Well, sir, Dick Clebone kept that dwarf bull around, just to sing, he said. Never would sell 'im, not even for an op'ry performer. Mrs. Forbes reminds me of that'n."

"She's sure spunky! I'm glad it's sixty miles 'r so to where she's at. I sure despise living in cities where you gets kept awake by loud speaker and permanent music. I don't mind coyotes 'r the whispering when the sand's running before the wind. They ain't civilized. You know, being civilized's a detriment to humanity. It gets on a man's nerve. That's what ails N'York an' Europe an' all them places. Tribulation's bad 'nough, but think of Chicago an' Kansas City an' Sante Fé an' Flag Staff an' all them metropoluses. Don't it make you turn your toes in an' hunch up, thinkin' of them gawd-awful crowds? It does me. The two worsest things in this world is big cities an' a noisy woman. But I s'pose it takes all kinds and rattlesnakes to make the world."

"It sure do—and does," Park Cable declared. "You might add Lop-Ear to such sentiments."

"That's right!" Conklin exclaimed. "He's one blamed hypnotizing mesmerist, he is. He buffaloes the landscape with his performances."

So the riders talked, seriously about unimportant or amazing matters, but with gay persiflage and carelessness about what might have seemed to some to be the essentials. And so they kept the world's affairs level, averaged down and up to a reasonable equality of the range—themselves included. Of all those they jeered and abused the most affectionately; the most urgently insulted were the most capable and likable.

Conklin told the story of his wanderings. He pictured the range of the wolf pack. He told of the other lobos and coyotes who must acknowledge the Lop-Ear band as supreme. He talked baits, blind sets, snares, poisons and agreed heartily that bullets were the only sure means to be rid of the devasting scoundrels.

"I came by Trembling Leaves pond, and stopped overnight at the cabin of Pretty Shells," he said. "While I was there a fellow who said he was Tom Redding came hammering on the door—"

"Didn't he hail from off yonder?" Park Cable exclaimed.

"No. Rapped the planks with his fist."

"If it'd been Pretty Shells—"

"She'd ought to have poured hot .30-30's through the door *pronto!*"

"What'd you do, Conklin?"

"Opened up. Talked turkey to him. He begged. He claimed he was come trapping fur, but I sent him back over the Divide. Reckon he'll stay yon side the summits."

"Who the —— is Tom Redding?"

No one knew. None even had a very clear idea of the country north of the Singing Bird range. No really big ranches were in that land, however. It didn't feed into Tribulation at all—too far and too rough to go there. It was a hundred miles or so to anywhere in that direction, from the top of the range.

Lava beds, bad lands, some timber in the mountains, the Disappearing River, some good bottoms where Latter Day Saints had established farms here and there at the edge of the wilds, were recalled as features of the territory. But ten thousand square miles added only a few words of real, known facts to the store of the Bell Brand outfit data.

"Good men have gone in there and never come out—or they come out bad," one of the boys who had said nothing about the region remarked at last. "I had an idee to see that land, one spell. It's the kind of a country you don't talk about when you've quit it."

"Must be one awful sweet home-abiding, Winslow," Conklin suggested. The man who knew nodded his dark and sharp-featured face, his eyes gazing into the fire.

"Yeh—if vinegar an' bitter-root's your idea of candy!" the cowboy admitted reluctantly. "Ever hear of the Scrambling Gulchers?"

"Say—um-m—reckon!" several nodded, grunting, Park Cable exclaiming, "That's so! Now't yo' speak of 'em—"

In mixed company of a cowboy crew there are topics about which one absolutely must mind his own business, even to the point of practically perfect ignorance. The Scrambling Gulch country was notorious for one sufficient reason. It had been the refuge and rendezvous of which every Western desperado had heard and to which led obscure and difficult trails at points along which were places where sheriff posses had turned back and beyond which very competent and fearless detectives had gone and never returned. Detectives on the one hand and friends of bandits on the other made it advisable for those who even mentioned that far back locality to do so in terms of curiosity and not of acquaintance or spite.

Delos Conklin had talked more about Lop-Ear's wolves and his search for their dens and range than he had talked in months of constant association with his fellow Bell Brand riders. The killer brutes had loosened his tongue. And now they had led to a certain covert linking of their notoriety with that of the ill-famed human desperadoes.

The rider who had been sent in pursuit of the wolves hesitated to go to sleep when he had stretched out on his bunk. He ransacked his memory for what he had heard with casual interest about the human outlaws. The Scrambling Gulch leadership was vested in three or four desperate men who had all been embittered at first by real wrongs. One, Phil Harvey, had been accused of misbranding a colt, and because his accuser was a successful horse rancher and he was a mere boy rider, it had led to a fight in which the youth had made a killing, and become a fugitive not from justice but from the victim's irate Horse Protective Association friends. Tim Scales had been made the scapegoat in a sheep raid, his cattlemen employers having let him go to prison "as an example," after making peace with the wool and mutton growers. Scales had broken jail, and taken to robbing banks, trains and other utilities. Tom Redding was neither of these.

In the waste of surmise, gossip and misinformation about the Disappearing River valley there was here and there a word about a sinister leadership which covered itself behind a screen of known, active miscreants. Curious yarns were told about a man who passed for reputable, with connections in important centers of the country, from San Francisco to Chicago. Nearly everything told about the mystery was incredible. Yet it might be some of it was true. Somebody might be a link between the outside world and the fugitives from punishment for many varied crimes. Conklin could but resent the danger which spread so wide that it silenced the tongues of even usually reckless cowboys.

The Scrambling Gulchers explained well enough the fellow who had come to Pretty Shells's cabin hammering on the door contrary to the code which demands that honorable men hail from a distance rather than alarm a woman by their coming, unbidden, to the door. Always in criminal bands are degenerates from civilized standards. Tom Redding was trapping between his raids on earnings of honest people, or at least on the accumulations of those who conformed to the conventional rules of conduct. Many a scouter from the law retreats to the fur land wilds after a hold up or an attack.

"Wonder if I really fooled that brute?" Conklin puzzled, for he was badly concerned about the woman who, going Indian according to her blood, had cheerfully made her claim for peace and happiness on the Singing Bird Mountains. As a man, knowing what he did, he could not leave her unguarded. Circumstances were favoring him in his not-too-welcome necessity. As soon as Wool-Head heard the wolf report he would order Conklin to stay with them till they were destroyed. He must become, for the time at least, the professional trapper for the Bell Brand range.

In the morning the crew took their time repairing and soaping their leathers, making ready for the beef round-up which was now at hand. As soon as Plack returned he would order work to begin. This would mean longest days of peak efforts, straining all equipment and forcing each man to the limit of his endurance. A breathing spell for a day or two would prepare them for their task.

And then, coming along the Shake-Down trail, they saw the dust of the ranch buckboard. And presently they could make out the animals, and were curious to observe that there seemed to be only one on the seat, driving—and that one quite too small for the bulk of Wool-Head. Indeed, it was Pretty Shells lifting and swaying to the climb and fall of the four wagon wheels.

"Well, where's the he-man?" Conklin asked.

"Oh, he's married and gone on his honeymoon," she chukled.

"What!" the grouped and approaching listeners shouted, adding with emphasis, "*Who?*"

"It's wonderful!" she laughed cheerily. "Run this stuff into the cook-house, will you? It's a feast. And— No, not those things! They're mine. Keep them separate! And that's a good boy—I won't say a word till the horses are out and the harness up!"

The crew scattered in all directions, taking care of the arrival's necessities. She had, however, headed off Conklin, who would have kept away from her.

"Wool-Head says you're the wolver, now. I must tell you about Lop-Ear. He brings his pack through my own country—"

"I followed him there, Pretty Shells," he nodded. "I've some things I must tell you. A man came down from the north yesterday, blazing a line down through to the edge of the lower timber line, claiming the trapping and building cubbies. He started to smash in the cabin door, so I came out. I'd stopped there. I borrowed one of your horses to bring in my stuff. Lop-Ear and his wolves killed my pack horse the other day. I knew you wouldn't mind—"

"Indeed not! Oh, it's so little I can do for you! But that fellow?"

"I told him what was what. I told him it was my trapping country. He expected to find you there alone. He must have heard or seen—"

"A tall man, long legs and long body? Yes—I saw him across the lake. He came out to drink, quickly like a lone wolf afraid of the day. Well?"

"I ordered him out of the country, back over the north divide of the Singing Birds. He promised. He had to or— Well, he said he would. If you ever see him you must shoot him on sight, Pretty Shells! I mean it. He's bad."

"I'm glad you were there," she nodded. "That hardware is all traps, No. 5's, which Wool-Head sent you. He'll be gone a week. He said for you to get busy. Yesterday the pack killed three hundred sheep over in the junipers east of Tribulation. On Lop-Ear the reward is a thousand dollars. On the other five, five hundred each. The Sheep and Cattle Growers' Association are going to pay your wages and expenses. They said tell you to go the limit!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS.

"SO WOOL-HEAD'S married, did you say?" Park Cable asked Pretty Shells, when all hands were at the supper table, ready to listen to the astounding surprize of their Bell Brand ranch life.

"Yes," she nodded, laughing with approval.

"But how the —— did it happen! Why, that feller wa'n't a lady's man."

"But he was—Amelia Forbes's lady's man!" she laughed again. "You see, he made up his mind on the way to Tribulation. Always, he would think about her and her glorious head of red hair. So he wished he could please her. And arriving in town he went at once to her house. A man was in her sitting room, a man who had been visiting her. He was a lawyer. You see, she had a boarding house and made a good living, and she would cook well for her husband. She would have a place for him to live. Wool-Head went in. He didn't ever think much of lawyers, and he especially didn't like this Len Harden, Judge Harden. When Harden came to Tribulation a year ago, he defended a man who was accused of blotting brands you remember —that Trinity River fellow. Harden found a law somewhere to let the fellow go. Since then Wool-Head and he haven't been friendly."

"You bet not!" Cable nodded.

"Harden wouldn't shake hands with Wool-Head, and the next he knew he was pike-poled through the front window over the picket-fence into the middle of the street. He was running on all fours when he landed, and Mrs. Forbes was very indignant at the way Wool-Head treated her friend. She got knee-holds on his neck and claw-holds in his hair."

"*Whooe-e-e!*" the listeners exclaimed, breathlessly.

"She was a regular wildcat. He had an awful time getting her loose. They became better acquainted in the next ten minutes than they'd ever been in the past five or six years."

"That's right," one of the boys mused. "Nothing like a scrap to git to know a lady. I 'member one time—"

"Aw, shut up!" he was silenced.

"There was lots of excitement. Everybody was running to look-see. Then she kicked him in the eye and he—"

"What! How'n —— could she—"

"He was holding her kind of upside down— And he started to run. He came down the street and she had him by the belt. They crossed the plaza into the courthouse. He couldn't get away. He apologized so nice and she was so sorry the way his eye hurt they shook hands and made up. Then he asked her to marry him, and she called the county judge over, Mr. Sheldon; it was a real handsome wedding—very sentimental!"

"Well, by gosh!" Pasty Face Begane exploded, "Looks like he surrendered complete, getting licked and married both! That's an awful beginning—"

"Don't you think he was very wise, very shrewd, so cleverly winning his heart's great desire?" Pretty Shells inquired with a little smile.

"I can see where things ain't going to be so dog-gone quiet around this here Bell Brand outfit any more!" Cable sighed.

"It will be very beautiful!" the widow declared.

In something of a daze the cowboys went about the affairs of the big outfit. There was no formal superintendent or foreman. Wool-Head did his own bossing. Talking it over, the hands divided up the work to be done. Conklin shook out the wolf traps, tried their springs, and talked a good deal with Pretty Shells, who told him the lore she knew about wolves.

"But do not forget no two are ever alike," she warned him. "Lop-Ear will never be caught by bait. You must trick him. He knows all this country better than any man. Until you know him better than he knows men you can not hope to defeat him. A rabbit needs to know only how to eat grass, but to catch a jack a coyote must know his own affairs and the rabbit's, too. And lobos know more than coyotes, because they are obliged to outwit mares who have colts and men who ride herd to cattle or tend sheep."

"Was I foolish, Pretty Shells?" he exclaimed. "I saw them all passing along the slope below the timber on Singing Bird. All but one jumped high and wide over the wagon tracks. The big pale one was clumsy and fell in the hoof prints of your horses. He squealed, frightened. But I was afraid it was too far to shoot with any chance of hitting them, and I waited a better time—"

"You look a long way ahead!" she said soberly. "That is, in trapping and hunting wolves!"

"Perhaps in other things, too," he suggested in a tone that made her wonder what exactly he had in mind, yet continued in a way to interrupt her thoughts, "I don't like the idea of your being out there all alone."

"No, that is not the way to feel about it. I do not go there to be alone. Rather I went to consult King Squirrel and Queen Magpie. The jays, who are all rogues, are still to be respected for their laughter. I may even be able to make the Great Bear listen to me."

"As long as you are not seen by that fellow Tom Redding, or whatever is his real name, I know you'll be all right."

"He is the evil devil of the mountain chain," she admitted. "He came there when Running Voice and I had built our cabin. He despised an Indian. At the same time he hurried on his way, after Running Voice had told him how to find the passes over the mountains into the more distant Disappearing River basin. He spoke about Indians taking all the furs, as though they should belong only to white trappers. I do not know. I never said one word before about it. Yet I believe he envied Running Voice his many good furs. I never liked him. It was a great kindness to me telling him that if he came over to this side of the Divide he must contend with you. Truly, the half of all the furs here are now yours!"

"Not much!" he laughed. "My job is the wolves—that's all."

"You can not unsay it!" she laughed. "With the timber belt part of Lop-Ear's range you may have to seek them there. No place is better to set a wolf trap than in lake-shore sand where they run, spreading their paws. The task is worthy of a reader of wolf minds!"

"It's a job, putting down four-square inches of trap-pan trigger in ten thousand square miles of lobo country where one certain wolf is going to step on it a week or two later."

"Yet you do not deny you hope to do just that!"

"No, that's so!" he chuckled wryly.

"I have a good many Number 1's and 2's, Kangaroo Jumps and Triple Clutches. I do not intend to use the half of them—you can use what you want for small furs."

"No—I'm a wolver," he shook his head. "It'll take all my time learning to know those big fellows, to set and tend them. You can't do fur trapping and outlaw wolf-hide trapping, both."

"They've offered one hundred dollars bounty on any lobo, besides the big money on Lop-Ear and his wicked partners. You have trapped wolves?"

"Just a few. I spent a winter in Minnesota when a boy. I was in Canada nearly a year, back country. That was before I landed in the West."

She was turning a gray steel wolf trap over and over in her hands, shaking her head doubtfully.

"Where'll you begin putting down your traps?" she asked after a time.

"I'll start at headquarters. To put out a forest fire you get at the heart of it," he answered, explaining: "There is a big dome of washed-down mountains between Needle Tops and the west end of the Singing Birds. There are the Wolf Dens—I call the country. It's the hangout of all the wolves in this country—rabbit hunters and stock killers both. Some go into the timber belt on Singing Bird mountains, but probably the snow'll drive them back into the Wolf Dens hangout. Anyhow, I saw their tracks in woods and open desert—the same wolves. Bare ground trapping is easier than in the snow. They can't read a trapper's tracks so well, in any event."

"Good luck!" she wished him. "You plan well!"

"More luck to you!"

"You have been here a long time; how old were you when you came?"

"Just a boy—I'd been out of college a year. I was twenty-two."

"You need not have been just a wolver if you had stayed back there."

"No."

"You keep going farther and farther back."

"Why not? What are *you* doing—talking to me!"

"I'm Indian," she replied. "More is not expected or wanted of me."

He shook himself impatiently.

"Suppose you catch Lop-Ear and kill all his band—then what?" she asked.

"That'd mean thirty-five hundred dollars."

"A good stake, boy, to make a good start," she suggested.

"I haven't caught 'em yet," he shook his head. "Time enough to figure on spending the money when I deposit the warrants in the bank."

"I think you will, though. I don't mean you shouldn't go after them. You'll be better paid than as a cowboy. You'll be far back, miles from any ranch, finding the places where the wolves hide. Men in such circumstances do not always maintain their human attributes but degenerate nearer the level of the wild creatures who have had no advantages of ten thousand generations of fixed traditions and recorded experiences. You'll be better paid, however, than a cowboy. Truly, I should like to make my meaning clear to you. There is more in you than just the ability to trap outlaws. Do you know what I like best in all that I know you have done?"

"I should like a good deal to know," he answered.

"Then I shall tell you. I like to think of your standing there watching Lop-Ear and his fleeing sheep-killers running to hide in their far retreats among the Wolf Dens, as you call their hiding place. You used your judgment. If you had shot at them, I should have been badly disappointed. It would have spoiled for me, a woman, a picture I should not like to see ruined. Oh—I know you do not expect me to say such things. I may not have even the right to do so. Red blood is in my veins and that means love of the loneliness of the forest and desert. White blood is in my veins and this means a struggle for ideals and the longing of ages for better things than we children of civilization have yet attained. I war with myself. My heart challenges my soul. But though you are all white, still you are gifted with the great boon of dissatisfaction. If it is ignobly yielded to, what excuse have you? But if you make of your temptations the stepping-stones to usefulness according to your opportunities and genius, surely you are blessed. When you have caught the outlaw band of wolves are you going on catching wolves?"

"I don't see how you foresee such things!" he blurted out.

She chuckled as if there were probably a good many things he did not know about her particularly and about women generally. She had probed a part of his mind which he supposed to be hidden from every one, the ambitions he had inhibited and the hopes he had failed to nourish.

"But I've got to catch those wolves!" he urged. "What comes after—it may be a long time—will take care of itself."

"Yes, of course!" she nodded. "By all means—but please never forget that it may be only a beginning, just an episode!"

She left him with a thought which somehow she had branded on his imagination. He gathered his trapping outfit and made up his packs. When, three days later he was ready to go almost westerly to the Wolf Dens, the headquarters of the outlaw pack, Pretty Shells was also ready to go on her own nearly due north trail toward the Singing Bird mountains. The ranch boys helped both of them load their horses and just after sunrise they waved good-by all around to go their lonely ways. And, for hours, whenever the cow hands looked, they could see the dark spots and later merely the tufts of tawny dust where the tiny cavalcades wended their ways.

While the riders were waiting on her and helping her with all her affairs, Pretty Shells relaxed and gave them her gracious praise. Now she sat erect in her saddle, standing on her stirrups with her back taut, her wide-brimmed hat a bit aslant, and watchful, her head turning from side to side as she surveyed the green timber of the mountain belt ahead. She glanced in all directions. At intervals she turned to gaze reflectively for a minute or two at a time over to her left where descending into the low Flats of the Dancing Maids she could see the wolver on his way to exterminate the raiders.

She knew what it was to have the affection of men. To her it was a little bewildering to be so well regarded. She suffered infinite pity when now and again one of the boys packed his sawbuck and rode away because he could no longer endure his failure to possess her. But she had always succeeded in persuading even the most ardent that her heart just had not responded to his. Her very tenderness had increased the pain of those who loved her, but in all the world there was not one honest man who had been embittered by her. She could resist without being hard, she could even flirt a little, playfully, and so well that none could misunderstand her good nature. Now when she looked after Delos Conklin in the tenderness of her compassion she was obliged to steel her heart a little against him, not to protect him, but to save her own self from a new and living sorrow.

Indian, she could be patient and she could keep herself from giving any sign. The poetry of her savage forefathers had given her an overwhelming longing for the inestimable privileges of those fastnesses of the Singing Bird Mountain chain. To this love of Nature was added the certain practicality, the methodicalness, the mathematical order of the white race. Feminine intuition enabled her to understand the spirit as well as the material things. She could read between the track of wolves or the words of men. And though she went her way bravely to the cabin on Trembling Leaves pond in the Bubbling Sands chain, she knew fear—the strange and unconquerable foreboding that sometimes lies in the shadow for those who go into the wilderness and which Indian lore and white records unite in calling the devil of it.

Her emotions added to the charm of her wild home. The memory of her dead husband, Running Voice, had retreated to the dark niche of her heart. He had given her great happiness. She would have loved him as long as he lived. She had not expected ever to free her heart of the anguish of his cruel and unexplained assassination. The shock of finding him lying dead with a bullet through his back over at the head of the Trembling Leaf pond, by the inlet, had whitened two spots at her temples. These she had always covered with her fine, wavy black hair, using artfulness. Now she changed her coiffure. She was startled, when she saw the effect of her new mode in her mirror. She colored wonderingly to find how beautiful she had become. She recognized her rare gift, or rather reward, not knowing why or whence. It did not dawn on her that she was magnificent because she had been kind, had pitied and been gracious, was good—but she needed no one to tell her that she was in love. Her splendid affection permeated her, giving tints to her cheeks, grace to her figure, the glory of a trembling flower to her gesture and rare flames to her eyes.

She went about her tasks with quiet precision. She neglected not one most trivial act or bit of work in all the multitude of things she had to do. Her cabin was immaculate. Her kitchen utensils shone from her efforts. She mocked the jays and magpies to their own delight and confusion. And now that the season was approaching, she watched the passing by of mink to see the fluff of their hair, waiting for the blue to pass and the prime fur to show itself in the richness of its color. Frosts, the coloring and fall of the broad leaves of the deciduous trees, the whitening of the mountain tops with squalls of snow and then the passing by of the coyotes from the heights past the ponds on their autumnal migration into the lower and warmer levels were all significant and she noted them constantly.

And so she waded down the outlet one day to set traps at pools where she had seen tracks of otter. And, sure enough, she had read the signs aright. She found a great lutra sunk by a fatal stone in the dark water. When she examined the fur it was prime. She apologized to the Great Otter for her necessity. Presently she put out traps for mink, then marten and pekan, and the first snow betrayed red foxes into snares she had set with smoky brass wire.

The forest floor was alive with rich game. Plenty of food had given all the creatures ample supplies. Their tracks covered the revealing page with a thousand tales of their adventures and the tragedies of the necessities of the living and the fates of the victims of the ravenous. And Fortune had played a curious prank on the young woman who had thrown herself upon the mercy of Fate. That year silver and black foxes were at their best. The demand had never been so great in the fur marts. Pretty Shells made cunning lures and contrived deadly engines, which combined the intimate knowledge of the Indian nature student with the ingenuity of the methodical white race. She thought to catch red foxes worth ten or twelve dollars; instead she found silver grays and blacks worth hundreds of dollars; even the marten were not commonplace, for those she took were dark and their fur longer, heavier than any she had ever knowm.

For every hour she spent going over her trap-lines she spent another hour dressing the pelts. She liked little enough the tragedy and disaster she was bringing upon the beasts of prey which were her victims, but when she had their skins in hand, and must needs stretch and flesh, dry and handle them, this she loved to do. Of each one she made a peltage gem, a pretty fur so well taken care of that she knew nowhere was it better done by any hunter. There could be no other way to live!

She had seen nothing more alarming than the tracks of a passing cougar or a great bear looking for a den in which to hibernate. She was lulled into a feeling of security. The foreboding dread which at first had made her cautious and given her vague alarm was lost in the long days of her constant occupation.

A new moon waxed into a full, and then disappeared from the brilliant skies. Snows came and melted. The needles of the pines and spruces took on the bright winter polish. The birds were puffed up with the dark winter plumage. Even the passing of a wild and terrific blizzard left but a deep soft snow to exasperate the plunging members of the weasel tribe, mink and marten, otter and pekan who liked not at all this swimming in a crystalline sea. Donning her snowshoes, the young woman played through the forest, loving the pink and blue shadows cast by the winter sun upon the sparkling snow that festooned the shapely evergreens and covered the ground high up on their straight and shapely trunks.

When she skirted along the edge of the timber line, in and out among the juniper cedars, Pretty Shells looked far away to the lower desert valley. Far warmer down there, and the snow came and went. The colors were crystalline and beautiful. Her mind was recovering its equilibrium, her soul possessed new perspectives, and when from the high places she looked over at the Wolf Dens she wished she knew what was taking place there, hoping in her heart of hearts that Delos Conklin was as fortunate as she had been.

Those were busy weeks from early November to the holidays. Then a strange freak of the season came. The January thaw came early. It was a terrific downpour of warm rains. It enveloped the Singing Bird mountains in heavy mists of fog. The dripping of the trees tinkled upon a melody of floods that roared in every gulch and cañon.

Nothing like this had been known in years. A lake appeared down on the Flats of the Dancing Maids. The Bubbling Spring ponds were filled to the timber line. When the end came in a zero-whiff of wind and a falling of frost crystals the forest floor was bare even in the darkest shadows. The floods rapidly retreated. The runoff lowered a half in a day.

The trapper went forth to take up her traps. She had enough. The season of the best furs had passed. The mink had begun to fade, foxes to rub, and now the animals should be left to their courting and family affairs. She was gone three days. When she returned every skin she had caught had been stolen from her main cabin.

CHAPTER VIII

BROKEN FOOT, THE GUARD

FIRST of all Delos Conklin felt the isolation, his remoteness from the Bell Brand ranch, when he had settled down to the hard task of ridding the great range of the six outlaw wolves, to kill which he had been assigned by his employer's influence over the cattle and sheep growers of the Tribulation court district. He had been chosen because in all the land there was no wolver. Trappers were rather scorned by the population. A few boys had a dozen or two traps. Now and again some coyote attracted attention by catching chickens or a skunk took up its abode uncomfortably near a ranch or sheep fold. Running Voice had been the only professional trapper in the country, and he was a woods fur seeker, not an open desert man.

Conklin had talked trapping wild animals on occasion at the ranch table or before the fireplace. He had some theories on the subject. He had some remarkable stories to tell about the cunning of otter, the habits of pekans, the sharp practises of red foxes, and he had taken three or four old traps that had long hung disused in the Bell Brand harness shed to catch a coyote which was coming in close at night to the annoyance of Wool Head Plack. The capture of this animal had led to Conklin's reputation as a trapper. He rather liked the distinction. Now he was a little uneasy in his mind for fear his gesture had been a little too proud and confident. He had never caught a gray or lobo wolf and he knew his work was cut out for him. He was pretty sure that he knew more than most animals, but he had no illusions that he knew the business of Lop-Ear and his hungry pack well enough to fool the notorious beasts, beating Lop-Ear at his own game.

He had a pretty good general knowledge of the lay of the land. He went to the north end of the Needle Tops and pitched his tent in the cañon of the last spring. This he figured would be better than going to the water-hole in the Wolf Den knolls which he decided he could use to better advantage than drinking the water and having his horses there. He had learned a pretty serious lesson when he found his pack horse dead with the hobbles on the poor brute's hocks. He cringed with pity and regret every time he thought of the helpless animal cut down by the ferocious wolves. Moreover, the grass was better up the Needle Tops than in the barren Wolf Den waste of Bad Land and crumbling or broken stone.

Having made his camp, dragged down dead cedar stumps and hung up a blacktail deer which he was lucky enought to kill the first day, he rode the second day over to the Wolf Dens, studying particularly the runways and signs, the numerous caves and dripping-water formations. Coyotes skulked away when he approached too near. Some of them had never seen a man before, he could tell, for they were uncertain whether to flee or just circle around keeping their eyes open.

Tracks of big wolves, heavy ones that dragged their claws when they stepped in the loose sand, puzzled him. They did not look familiar when he came to study them carefully. He set two No. 5 traps, however, where a path had been worn around a corner of rock at the entrance into a dry wash. He buried the drags in the sand, wrapped the bright gray steel in thin, soft parafined paper to keep dirt from clogging the trap, and brushed the sand over the pit, roughing it all so as to make it look as much like the paw prints as he could. He noted well the location so he could find the place again, using a pyramid rock a hundred feet high as his landmark. He called these traps No. 1 and 2 in his trap-line list.

An acre of nearly level sand out of a gulch was circled and crisscrossed by the tracks of playful wolves. The animals seemed to have come down a path through a clump of sage on a side-hill. He walked around and at the top of the knoll he found a place between two rocks which was just right for a trap set. Without touching his hands to anything around he pulled sand out to make a pit, laid in the drags and chain and rested the trap, pan-up, in the hole. He covered the jaws with soft paper and then with a cedar paddle shoveled dry sand over the engine of destruction.

And thus here and there, wherever tracks seemed promising or the looks of the country was satisfactory, he put down trap after trap until he had gone some miles along the east side of the Wolf Dens. But only when he reached the bones of his dead horse did he have the feeling about the wolf tracks that they were made by the particular outlaws he was sent to capture.

The moment he came to a huge paw-print that showed the scuffling and wallowing of an awkward, enormous brute, he recognized the big fellow of Lop-Ear's band, and realized that all those other wolf tracks he had seen were those of strangers. He had studied to good purpose the tracks of the six where he had seen the band over on Singing Bird slope. This animal he knew. His cheeks warmed with an odd gratification.

The outlaw wolves lived in the northern part of the Wolf Dens. The evidence was plain, for Conklin one by one picked up the trails of the members of the pack, recognizing Lop-Ear's the moment he saw the faint impression of the tender paw. A trim and clearly made trail distinguished the half-breed wolf-dog.

Within a week Conklin had caught five lobos, but they were not outlaws. If they ever ate beef it was probably after a steer had met death by accident or had been killed by the outlaw band. The rattling of the chains and the whining of the victims spread the alarm throughout the Wolf Dens that a trapper had come. The tracks of Lop-Ear and his pack grew old. The band had gone romping away, Conklin wondering whether his presence had alarmed and warned them to leave permanently or whether it was just the chance of their going on another raid.

As soon as he found the raiders had departed he set traps throughout their home range. He knew meat or food bait would be futile. The animals ate nothing they did not themselves kill. But as a wildcrafter who knew at least a little about the brains and fancies of beasts and birds he discarded old-line trapping notions. The Lop-Ear band had been brought up on the efforts of ranch and farmer, sheep-herder and sport trap habits. Conklin realized that these wolves were of extreme intelligence, brutes whose cunning included a number of attributes generally considered in human intelligence to be the mark of distinction of mankind.

He sat at night by his camp-fire wondering what these wolves would be most interested in. His experience with foxes had given him an inkling, but only an inkling, of what to expect. He had tricked a good many foxes with what he called "curiosity baits." One time he had caught raccoons where they came down to wash their food beside a stream. He had wrapped some bright tinfoil around a trap pan and set the trap under water at the coon runway. A fool brown coon had wondered what in the world shone so in the sparkling light of the moon, and felt the tinfoil with its paw to release the trap jaws and thus come to its doom.

Now he found some of his wolf traps bedeviled. There was a wolf with a badly twisted paw which visited Conklin's traps to show contempt for the human's efforts. This fellow was a male who at some time had pulled away from a trap, the hurt hind-foot now dragging as he walked. He did not travel with other wolves. He gnawed bones when he found fresh ones. He dug roots to eat them. He patiently pulled needles of prickly-pear to eat the fruit and green lobes. He slept where weariness overtook him. Now and again Conklin saw where other wolves had chased this crippled beast, and in one place where five or six coyotes had circled around the unfortunate, making proud of their daring in plaguing a lobo which had fallen to low estate. But this outcast lobo followed the trapper's lines and dragged his most cunningly placed traps to expose them wherever they were hidden. He dropped dried bones on the pans, springing the jaws. He turned over and sprung the traps from underneath by pulling the pan from behind the jaws which closed without jeopardy from them.

Conklin found where this wolf had followed him for miles, like a still-hunter, fifty or a hundred feet off to one side of where the trapper rode his horse or went on foot. The brute ignored the green hide with which the trapper wrapped his feet to kill the human or betraying scent of moccasins or boots in the places where he walked. And more especially this fellow, to whom Conklin gave the name of Broken Foot, went up into the Lop-Ear den country during the absence of the pack, pawing out all the most cunning trap-sets in sand or alkali. Upon the return of Lop-Ear, however, Broken Foot slunk away five or six miles southward and skulked here and there till the outlaws departed again on another raid, when he returned to shower the evidences of his contempt wherever he found a pair of steel jaws laid to ambush the able leaders of the clan.

This hobo outcast of his own kind was presently getting on Conklin's nerves. He could but reflect the contempt which the wolves felt for the fellow, which even coyotes did not hesitate to display for a miserable, always starving wretch. But Broken Paw must have gone hungrier than ever on many a night in order to search out and betray the human menace.

Conklin despised any man who used poison to kill animals. Now he was driven to attempt to destroy this old fellow who upset every plan and scheme which seemed to promise a hope of success against Lop-Ear or others of the killers. Lop-Ear's pack returned to the Wolf Dens, lazy from a heavy gorge. Conklin found where two of them, the yearlings, trotted right around a turn and up a narrow jack-rabbit path toward a string of five blind-set traps in the runway. They were going right along, and there they found all five traps sprung and dragged, clogs and all, from their hiding places. Conklin saw by the surprized sidelong leap of the two beasts that they had not been thinking about traps. He would almost surely have caught one of these two—his first blood of the pack—but for that skulking meddler. And this fact stirred the wolver into a rare demonstration of his exasperated and helpless anger.

He put out a striped squirrel with strychnine in it. The wolf buried this deep in soft sand, and marked the place effectually. Conklin dragged a dead deer for miles through the Wolf Den knolls on his lariat and dropped along the way pellets of deer fat which each contained a translucent grain of poison. He found several coyotes and three lobos which had been deceived. He knew he had probably destroyed twice as many which he could not find—and these in turn would poison others which ate them. But these gave him little satisfaction, except to prove his own prowess in putting down bounty and hide money. Broken Foot ignored the drag line of poison completely, 'tending strictly to business, gnawing roots and amusing himself with fantastic revenge on every steel trap along eighteen miles of line sets.

Until this crippled evil genius was disposed of only a chance of luck would bring any of Lop-Ear's band to Conklin's stretching boards. The trapper was dealing with a vagrant wolf, one which had no den, no runways and no habits except the one of following the trapper's trail to neutralize every effort to kill or capture the able outlaws, nobility of the Wolf Dens.

One day Conklin wired two traps together, back to back. He set them both, wrapped them in soft parafined paper and put them at about the edge of Lop-Ear's district in the knolls. The pack was at home. They had come across the Flats of the Dancing Maids and skirted along the foot of the Needle Tops, howling in the night as they passed within half a mile of Conklin's camp and scattered to their holes in the northern knolls. On their arrival Broken Foot had painfully retreated from that part of the territory clear southward almost to the Needle Tops as his tracks chanced to show in a film of snow which had come drifting down and spread dirty with dust in the lees of stones and hills. While the outlaws were home Conklin knew the ostracised wolf would hang along the deep cañon which marked the southern end of Lop-Ear's district. He had found a place where Broken Foot always came by to sit awhile on a sugar-loaf knoll, with switching tail and scratching crippled paw as if he were whimpering and stirring uneasily about as he looked across into the forbidden country where beggars were not allowed to drag their twisted paws along, when the big fellows were at home.

That was an old trick, often successful in catching trap-turning foxes and coyotes. Conklin was rather sure the shrewd crippled lobo would not be fooled by it. At the same time the trick was worth trying. The trap was set with adequate care on a narrow ridge that led up to where the vagabond wolf went to his lookout. The wolver passed that way three times in three days and then skipped it as he circled into the back country. He saw Broken Foot's tracks coming down a dry wash and printed in the sand, his paw dragging and heading toward the knoll from which the outcast snuffled the north wind that came down over the Lop-Ear band country. To go look at the double-trap meant five or six extra miles; Conklin hesitated and then went to look.

When he came in sight of the ridge he saw, two hundred yards distant, that the wolf was there. He gave a little yelp of satisfaction, but his smile died from his lips when he came up to the caught beast. Broken Foot had been outwitted. His right forepaw had been caught half way to the heel. He had jumped and thrown himself a few times, but ceased after a few flounders. He now sat facing his doom.

His tracks had betrayed the truth about him. Some of his hair was gone, on account of an attack of the mange. He was gaunt and shaggy. His hip as well as his paw was badly twisted. His back was kinked and his tail was nearly hairless, like a rat's. Conklin had never seen a wolf so badly warped by misfortunes. There remained of all Broken Foot's frame only one feature which could hold attention.

His head was large, well haired and not old. Broken Foot looked to be twenty years old, judging by his body, but his head was that of a six or seven year old, in the prime of life. He lifted it now. His great eyes were wide open, brown and staring past the man toward the Lop-Ear home range. His ears were lifted straight up, twitching a little. His jaws were set and his tongue did not draw in and out between his lips. He neither begged nor hoped for mercy.

And when Conklin had destroyed the starved outcast, he could not quite bring himself even to take the scalp from that fine head. The ears and eyes would have served to draw a county treasury varmint bounty warrant for fifty dollars, but an odd compunction overcame the man who had so long been baffled and outwitted by this beast so that instead of adding to the disfiguring maims, he went up to the top of the lookout knoll, dug away a broken mass of stones and then erected a real cairn on the highest point, and placed on the top the heaviest monolith he could roll up and heave to it.

Then he went back to his main camp, calling it a day's work. And as long as he should live he knew he would never begrudge either the effort to make the monument—which none who should ever find it was likely to understand, especially if wolf bones were found beneath it, or the fact that for a bit of sentiment he had neglected a whack at fifty iron men.

When he sat contemplating his long drawn efforts to make progress against the killer pack, Conklin for the first time was able to feel that he at last had made a palpable stride. Broken Foot had been a genuine sentinel guarding the approaches to the safety of Lop-Ear and the inner or upper circle of wolves. Having cleared the way that much, the wolver could now measure the distance he had come. He had won the privilege to come to grips with the quarry he sought.

"Now I'm ready to begin!" Conklin said to himself, with realization of the situation.

He puzzled a long time that evening. Commonplace tactics were of no avail; he must gather to his aid all the scattered lore of special cases in which novel methods had been used.

What he needed was an idea. He could think of nothing hopeful as he sat before the fire wondering. When he stretched out to sleep, he could not lose his consciousness as his mind reached and groped. He seldom lost his rest in this way. When at last he fell into oblivion he was weary beyond measure.

But when he awakened in the morning he was astonished to find ready-made in his imagination a suggestion as simple as it was useful.

CHAPTER IX

THE TANGLED PACK

WHEN he returned to Lop-Ear's kingdom, Conklin left his horse foot-loose with bridle off and tied to the saddle; no hobbled horse for him in the killer's range! Then he crossed the region in a great circuit, marking his course by definite pilot knobs and sags in the land. When night fell he had hung fourscore wire nooses between tufts of sage, in clumps of prickly-pear, where clusters of weeds had grown in moist bottoms, and along runways where they came down banks through stunted bullrush and arrowbush.

The night was freezing. A stinging wind came against his back from the north. He was hungry. His water canteen was empty by the time he had made the miles to the sag between the Wolf Dens and the Needle Tops. He had broken a blister on his right foot. He was so weary he sweat, and the dry, bleak wind snatched the moisture away, leaving the salt powder to cut and sandpaper his skin. Every step demanded a conscious effort. And when he drew his breath it whistled through his teeth which throbbed with the cold. Physically he was all done.

But mentally he was in a mood to sing songs. He knew that at last he had hit upon, having earned it, a scheme which would give him an even break against the Lop-Ear pack of lupine outlaws. He asked no better odds than a fifty-fifty chance with those villains, or against any outlaw, for that matter. As he surged stumbling along he fell into the easier rhythm of a marching tune which gave him a measure by which to step. In the sharpest hour toward morning, when all the stars were sparking in the polish of the bitter zephyrs, he arrived in camp where his runaway horse came whinnying doubtfully to greet him, teasing to have the saddle removed from his faithless back.

"You blamed scoundrel!" he exclaimed, but the tone of voice told the horse he did not wholly mean it. The removal of the saddle and a whack on the flank with an open palm sent the animal, apparently with a conscience somewhat relieved, prancing and kicking off up the valley for more grass.

Conklin built a fire. He hung his coffee pot on the trammels and emptied a jar of soup into a kettle to heat. He stripped and rubbed down as briskly as his sore muscles could do it, and put on a dry clean woolen suit of underwear and thick woolen socks. By the time he had done this his soup was boiling and he drank, sipping a quart of the rich venison broth. He drank a little coffee and turned in among his blankets, wrapped up in his great waterproof tarpaulin, and as he moved his head to ease the crinkle of his ear on his pillow of boots and folded coat he lost consciousness in sleep. Roseate dawn was already at large across the sky.

He did not awaken till afternoon. He was stiff and sore. He dozed off two or three times before he emerged late in the day to cook himself a square meal. He devoted two hours to concocting a feast. He had spitted haunch of vension and courses of hot bread and driproast gravy, a sweet cake baked in a Dutch oven and some dehydrated-apple sauce. He ate leisurely of his meal and went out to talk a while to his horses who came prancing down to greet him.

This had been his first day of leisure. He had harried the wolves for more than two months. He had thought of nothing else. He had entered upon a novel occupation with rather commonplace knowledge but unusual abilities. He relaxed and now let his thoughts wander to other subjects. He knew he was come to a crisis in his wolf hunt. It was in the air.

Since he had been out two months, it was about time for him to go in and report to his employers. His string of lobo hides would prove his industry. Knowing the situation exactly, he realized that his efforts had not amounted to much more in real accomplishment than a snap of his fingers. The ranchers and sheep owners would not know that. A wolf was a wolf to them, whether the beast had caught a thousand jack-rabbits which destroyed a hundred tons of good beef fodder, or had killed three calves a week. But Conklin was not fooling himself. He was of the opinion that he had only just begun to trap. He was now in a position to make a really serious effort to catch Lop Ear and his raiders.

He was tired enough still to sleep pretty well that night. He was up at false dawn the following morning and was on his way to the Wolf Den knolls before sunrise. He carried his rifle, some lunch, a canteen of water and no traps. He would look his lines over and the following day he planned to head across the Flats of the Dancing Maids for the Bell Brand ranch, which he could see from the high places. Thought of meeting the boys again filled him with emotion. He had never before been even as long as a week away from companionship. He was now beginning to talk to himself for sake of hearing a human voice.

He crossed the sag and looked along the line of his southern traps. Then he came to the range of Lop-Ear's band within which he had set his wire snares. He passed a dozen of these. Then ahead of him he saw in the sand the track of a great wolf.

"The big fellow—Old Tawny!" he exclaimed to himself, recognizing the mark. They were heading toward a cluster of prickly-pear in which he had set two snares. Breathlessly he drew nearer. The tracks in the alkali dust led into the cactus and he began to stretch his neck, looking. And as he circled around he came in sight of what he had hardly dared anticipate.

There hung the pale giant of the Lop-Ear pack, where he had run his head through the treacherous loop of wire which had been hung between two stalks of tall spine-misted clump. He had not noticed the tiny line, like a slender vine that dragged against his massive chest. The loop had closed about his neck. He had given a frantic leap, thrown himself in somersaults, pitching his strength against the implacable metal strand, hanging himself over a high fork to dangle limp — his cattle killing and sheep raiding forever done.

Conklin sat staring for a long time. He could hardly believe his own eyes. He had not anticipated such immediate results. He had succeeded this much before he was aware he had more than begun his efforts to win against the outlaws. When he dismounted and sought to drag the carcass out, he found the wire had cut deep and been twisted all about the cactus. He was obliged to cut it in several places. And when he skinned away the hide, he found it punctured by a thousand of the cactus quills. He could but wonder that he at last had made an inroad on the band which had done tens of thousands of dollars in damage. He realized, however, that this fellow was the most stupid of the six.

Tying the limp pelt on the horse the trapper rode on. He stopped at the fatal set to look it over again. A few cents' worth of good wire, set according to the clues given by a hundred thousand or so exact facts, had proved the means of capturing a five-hundred-dollar reward. The wolver was well satisfied. He was about to hang another snare to catch another wolf, perhaps, in the same place. But when he looked at the runway his mind, now alert, made a significant observation.

The only wolf tracks through this particular patch of prickly-pear on that narrowing of runway passage were those of the tawny giant. Apparently no other wolves went that way. Come to think about it, the wolf band in a measure broke up and scattered when they arrived home in the Knolls. They traveled on their raids together, but they separated on coming to their range. And when Conklin back tracked two miles on this runway over into a tumult of broken rocks and boulders he found the wolf's own den. And from the looks of it, and from tracks leading off into other territory, this huge fellow had had a certain degree of interest in two or three lobos over toward the southwest. Conklin wasn't sure. He just made a guess at it. It was an interesting surmise, anyhow, that when the Lop Ear band relaxed they lorded a bit around among lobos of a lesser breed, perhaps stalking along proudly where frightened and admiring coyotes might see the great ones passing by.

The day was a windfall of success. Eighteen snares farther along two wolves had come racing after a jack-rabbit. The frightened long-ears had leaped twenty or twenty-five feet in its terrified dash to escape. Because the wolves were going so swiftly and digging their claws in so hard Conklin was not sure of their identity as he looked ahead toward an acre of sage through which led several paw-trodden ways. When he rode up on to an overlook off to the north where he could see into all parts of this miniature screen of thin "woods," he could only utter an exclamation of astonishment, for there dangling like limp rags as they hung over shrubs twisted and pulled about as if by giant hands he saw two unmistakable carcasses.

He had snared the two young but competent members of Lop-Ear's band. The ground under the sage brush was covered with a thin sifting of snow and loose alkali dust as well as sand. Jack-rabbits were not plenty in the Wolf Den knolls, naturally. But here were the tracks of three. One of the trails had been made by the fleeing quarry of the two racing wolves. The jack had gone clear over the sage touching the ground only in open places. The wolves had followed straight through until on the far side of the growth one of them had shot his head through the snare between two thickets with a runway between. He had been jerked with his head back and his hind paws had struck the dirt clear beyond the edge of the sage clump, and then the limber spring of the brush to the top of which the wire had been fastened had jerked the beast back and over the brush to the ground again, fairly in the face of the second wolf which was several yards behind.

This other wolf had flung himself out of the way. He had walked off sidewise in nervous wonder, watching the frantic struggles of his partner. Then as he realized the fact that death was in that anguish—that the mystery was menacing him—the wolf turned and dashed back through the sage brush and, going through another runway, ran his own head into another of the five-snare cluster in that acre and died as his deserted partner had done.

"Three of them!" gasped Conklin, overwhelmed by his good fortune.

He was weak with the evidence of his success. At no time had he lost faith in his ability, nor doubted the ultimate capture of these destroyers. He had not, however, anticipated or even dreamed of being overwhelmed by such an avalanche of good luck.

He skinned out these two victims, leaving the head intact as he had done with the mastiff skull of the big fellow, and went on his way again. There remained a score more of snares to look at. He went on past these perfunctorily, inspecting them from a distance. A trapper keeps away from his engines as far as possible, so as not to arouse the suspicions of intended victims who would ponder on the meaning of the occasional or frequent passing of a human in particularly runway neighborhoods. Even deer and bear notice where hunters go by, and keep an eye on human trails. Far more a wolf pays attention to the questionable habits of his enemies of a thousand generations.

Sure enough, there were no more wolves in the snares. A coyote had been hung up at the last one, and the wind had blown another around edgewise to the runway it menaced. But it had been a tremendous day. The wolver was dry-mouthed with his success. He was dazed, fairly numbed by what he had actually done. He circled down out of the knolls and started for the camp on the Needle Tops.

He had a string of steel traps set along here. He was tired. He was quite sure none of them contained anything worth going to. Yet because he was a thorough worker, with some feeling of compassion for the poor brutes whose appetites made them essential victims of cattle grower and sheep raiser enemies, he went up the draws and valleys to where he had placed the engines of capture.

As he rode in the soft sand of the approach to the fine spring where he had camped the night he lost his horse to the attack of the lobos, three of whom were now dead, he heard the distant clink and the metallic rattle of a chain. The noise brought him up short with a jerk. He knew the timbre of that sound. No common beast was struggling thus with a trap! After the first gesture of his tense surprize, he quirted his horse around to the left and dashed into a dry wash up which the fight of some beast was being made against the hopeless odds of a high grip triumphant trap.

Coming around a bend in the steep-sided channel of cloudburst floods he saw a tumbling and bounding mass of sage and cactus, of shining line of polished steel chain and reaching paws and tangled patches of hair.

"Wolf!" he exclaimed and drove a bullet into the heart of the agitation.

There was a convulsive straightening out of the balled up mass. The broken branches of sage fell away. The very chain slumped down. The beast, which had been all doubled into a center of terror and gnawing, snapping fight, shook itself to its feet and stood all clear for an instant, head up, tail out, eyes bright and bulging, mouth open with blood dripping from two jaws full of broken teeth.

The trapper staggered back and sat partly standing against the steep clay-bank of the wash. He was stammering and trembling as he saw the head of his victim. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. His throat drew up in gasping excitement.

The wolf was medium-sized. He was a dark and proud-headed beast, who dying faced his enemy in the pose of those creatures which die on their feet.

One ear stood up and pointed toward the staggered and retreating man with his back to the dirt wall. The other ear was fallen down and had along its crumpled base a white scar where, long before, a bullet had destroyed the cartilage.

"Lop-Ear!" Conklin whispered. "Good Lord— Is that you, Lop-Ear?"

And for answer the leader of the outlaw

pack collapsed where he stood covering the trap in whose steel would always be the gouges and the scrapes where the victim had bit and wrenched even that hard metal.

CHAPTER X

PRETTY SHELLS' DISTRESS

DELOS CONKLIN had caught four of the six miscreants of the wolf pack which so long had troubled the stock range. Lop-Ear, the leader, had succumbed to skill and luck. The wolver's task was therefore probably accomplished, for the two remaining members of the band, the slender half-breed wolf-dog and the female, would hardly have the strength or ability to carry on a proportionately destructive career, even if they still had the will to continue their raiding. The trapper could at least now return to the Bell Brand ranch, for he would do well to report to Wool-Head and his association employers the results of his campaign.

Accordingly, Conklin took up his traps and snares, broke camp and, making his packs for the sawbucks of the carrier animals, prepared for departure. He left the four chief skins of his major victims outside the other bundles. When he had loaded his animals he tied the skins of the wolves to the top bundles where they would dangle, flaunting the broken ear, the tawny giant, and the dark and handsome youngster hides where the sun would shine on them, and perhaps some passing vulture circling over the desert of the Flats of the Dancing Maids would see them. The truth is he wanted those trophies to be seen when he should swagger over to the Bell Brand outfit and nonchalantly begin to slip the bridle and loosen the cinches of his saddles.

But a surging and overwhelming desire came to him to find some good excuse for going along the slope of the Singing Bird mountains, thus to come down from the north to Wool-Head Dan Plack's ranch outfit. He refused to acknowledge to himself the motive which was urging him to this. At the same time he was aware in the depths of his understanding of a transformation which had taken place in his heart during the lonely months of his isolation and wolf hunting.

Pretty Shells had started a new train of thought in the depths of his subconsciousness. As he hesitated over several plans for his visit he removed the four lobo pelts from their banner fastenings and made them into a neat and inconspicuous bundle lashed like the others to the common bulk of the loads. He looked his camp site over, making sure he had left no dish or tool behind, swept the cañon and the mountains with a farewell swing around of appreciative gaze and cracked his quirt to startle his little cavalcade on their way.

Emerging into the breadth of the long valley with its ceaseless parade of the Dancing Maid whirlwinds he looked wonderingly across the Flats to see on the far side where the ranch stood. It would be nearly twice as far to go around by the foot of the Singing Birds timber line. Snow made a lace collar along the high slopes following the line below the dark green timber belt. He swung his pack horses to go that greater distance however. His resolution did not come from the desire to show Pretty Shells the skins of the lobos he had outwitted. Indeed, at the moment the wolves had nothing to do with it. Their capture was no longer a considerable feat. It was merely a bit of by-play in the scheme of lives.

"I'll go tell Pretty Shells she's right!" he explained to himself in so many words as he cut across the head of the Flats of the Dancing Maids in the direction of the place where he knew he would strike the entrance of the wagon trail into the woods, which were now silhouetted against the acreages of snow wherever openings were visible behind the shapes of the trees.

That was a long day. The blow of each hoof rang on the ground, which was mostly frozen, like drum-sticks on vibrant rawhides. The air seemed thin as it was clear. It dragged like razor blades across the skin, leaving its sting at every invisible gust. The sky was blue, with no moisture crystals in it to give a milky tinge. Except for the horses and the man there did not seem to be one living thing anywhere in all the enormous field of vision, not from the crest of the Singing Bird mountains rising white and jagged against the northern sky, nor anywhere down the south lee to where the edge of the desert valley dipped beneath the horizon. But against the Sparkling Dawns the ranch suggested the living that might be —its blocks of fields and the toy-like buildings.

The distance to be traversed was too great for Conklin to hurry. The animals must be given their own time to cross that majestic plain, where it was so salt and arid that the very sage bushes were but tiny tufts of scraggly and aged dwarfs, widely scattered. Down from the surrounding mountain slopes stretched water-dropped streaks of red gravel beds, and waves of sand had been blown by northwest winds in reefs that were the color of gray pearl as the sun shone on them. There were spreads of level playas of creamy colored crystalline alkali, pools above which even close at hand appeared the shapely deceptions of strange mirage. And on one of these flattened crystal beds Conklin saw the prints of paws.

Lop-Ear and his five companions had crossed that clay while it was still moist after some rain-storm. Every one of the band had left seals sunk in the plastic surface. Even those tracks were filled with the spirit of the confident creatures romping as they raced, making imaginary killings in their savage expectations; staring at the tracks, the wolver had the illusion that above the printed page still hovered the ghosts of the four which had passed on. He was obliged to shake himself to be rid of the impression. In a measure it was the truth. Those six outlaws had put their personalities into everything they did—they had done it with all their power and instinct. Fate had overcome four of them. But not one need ever be ashamed when he faced in his new world any of the ghosts of his kind, particularly not any who had skulked and puttered around over in the Wolf Dens.

Conklin had the odd notion that when Lop-Ear should come upon Broken Foot over yonder, amends would be made. There'd be a new understanding. There'd be congratulation and recapitulation. The man followed on after his pack horses which had gone plodding along their way. The whole business was inexplicable. What was he doing out here, catching wolves?

Night had fallen when the trapper reached the foot of the Singing Birds. He went out of stinging cold into an odd warmth. The sky changed into murky gloom in which a few stars of the first magnitude shone dimly. He knew the signs. When he made his camp that night he built his bed of boughs on a rise in the ground. And he took the trouble to pitch his tent. Rain began to fall and by dawn it was a deluge.

Swirls of fogs and mists, sweeping down out of gray winds, and sheeting of warm rains laid their war upon the vanishing crystalline snows.

"The January thaw's come early!" Conklin reflected, sitting before the fire he had built under a spread of tarpaulin. "Good thing I didn't go down into the big flats. If I'd been caught there, we'd had to swim in places."

He rested. He had nothing to do. He had been plugging steadily for nearly three months. He had not missed one day in all that time. He now felt in his relaxation the fatigue which shows even in the slow throbbing of the heart and the refusal of the mind to think consecutively. Yet the experience was pleasant. After having worked so hard his conscience let him excuse his satisfaction in utter indolence.

The horses browsed around close about where he cut a balsam which they could eat. He did some fancy cooking. Most of the time he stretched out on his bed of evergreen boughs, letting his fancies run as they would. He was glad the storm hadn't overtaken him when he came to pass the time of day at Pretty Shells' cabin. He ran his hand through his new-grown beard, wondering what she would say to see him come by, a long-haired trapper in the ragged habiliments of the deep wilderness?

He took his time. When the rain blew by in a gust of falling crystals and a tang of zero cold again, he waited a while for the water to run off and the soft swamps to freeze. He need not hurry. He was a man who had closed his case, so to speak. He wasn't quite sure what the date was. Some days he had lumped in his diary of trap-line notes, and the record was not explicit. It might be Christmas or more likely it was near New Year's—one side or the other!

Accordingly, when he had looked up two of his horses which had strayed, he repacked his outfit and started early in the morning to arrive about noon at Trembling Leaves pond. He surmised that he would not find Pretty Shells at home. Probably she would be out rebuilding her trap-cubbies and making ready for the big rush of the furs she could take now that the animals were released to run as they pleased on bare ground instead of wallowing in loose snow.

He was mistaken. When he rode up to the camp on his saddle horse, having turned his pack animals loose down close to the lower edge of the timber belt, he was met by Pretty Shells who heard his approach when the hooves of the horse he rode rang against the frozen rocks.

"Conklin!" she cried out in joy. "Oh, I'm so glad you have come!"

"What luck with the wolves?" she cried. "Lop-Ear and his band came by, crusting deer. They killed five between here and the next pond. That was two weeks ago. Did you find where they were weak?"

"Yes," he nodded, "I caught four—the big pale dog, the two yearlings as we called them, though they were really small three- or four-year-olds."

"Yes?" she asked, as he paused.

"And-Lop Ear—I caught him too!"

"You caught Lop-Ear?" she repeated, her tone oddly congratulatory and regretful, too.

"Yes, I felt like a hangman—"

"But how?"

"I was a hangman!" he exclaimed wryly. "I caught three in copper wire nooses. Lop-Ear I trapped in high-grip jaws. He jumped from a lookout rock and landed on a pan, where he always came down from looking off across the Flats of the Dancing Maids. I'd almost believe he went there to dream and plan his deviltries."

"Yes, I would believe it!" she nodded. "He was bad. He was savage. He destroyed living things wantonly. He had to die. But I am glad you are sorry, that you felt compassion for him even while you were obliged to exterminate them. You say two you did not kill?"

"The half-breed dog-wolf and the black female still remain. I left them. I had made up my mind to start the next day for the Bell Brand. I found all four caught, three snared and one trapped that trip over the lines. Fortune breaks that way sometimes. But you, Pretty Shells? What luck have you had?"

"I never caught so many furs in my life before. I had most beautiful black and silver foxes. I had mink, otter, pekan. I caught several reds and several beautiful cross foxes. But when I returned to my cabin, having taken up my traps, ceasing my winter killing, I found the door open. When I looked in I stood bereft of all that I had won. Some one had come and robbed me, Conklin. He stole all that I had. Not one pelt remains."

"Robbed by a fur thief!" he gasped, his face hardening as it reddened.

"Yes."

"When was that?" he stood tightening his belt.

"I found my fur all gone when I returned yesterday."

"Who did it—any clues?" He began to look about.

"I found a mitten which the robber left when he headed away."

"Could he carry all the skins on his back?"

"It would be a heavy load for a strong man. A powerful man might do it."

"Which way did he go?"

"You know when the ground froze it was full of water. The frost crystals sprouted out through the surface. I found footprints leading across the outlet of Trembling Leaves pond, and over the mossy ground beyond, trampling the ice ferns standing on the ground. He was going north."

"When was that?"

"Night before last, perhaps yesterday morning. I was not sure."

"All right, Pretty Shells. If you'll take care of my horse—tell you what you do. You'll find my pack horses down the trail at the timber line. Why don't you take them over to the Bell Brand outfit. Take your own horses, too. Sure you will—" he looked at her—"you must!"

"Why— But you'll return this way?"

"I may come around by Tribulation. I may come through here. It'll depend on the weather. You'll be at the ranch, won't you?"

"Yes," she nodded thoughtfully, studying the ground for a time. "You would do all this for me?"

"Pretty Shells, there is nothing I would not do for you," he cried. "When I come back I shall tell you—try to tell you what I can't delay now to put into words."

Rapidly she prepared a good meal while he made up a pack, taking one of her heavy woven blankets and a cowboy tarpaulin she had used to canvas her own outfit when she brought it in. He took jerked venison, smoked fish, and plenty of cold bread. He made sure he had plenty of matches, safe in a tight tin box, salt, cartridges and other necessities. When at last he sat down to eat, his own preparations were completed and over the table they did not talk about much of anything.

Her heart was singing, "I knew he would come," and his was throbbing at the thought of any one's imposing on a woman—such a woman—and with the increasing urge to avenge her, the more because he wanted particularly to protect her himself.

When they had drunk their coffee, he turned to take up his rifle. She came to the open door to help him put on his pack. He hesitated for an instant and then took her in his arms, not in farewell, but because this was the thing he wished most of all to do at that moment. Both knew his errand out on the trail of the raider was one of deadly peril. And he kissed what was to him the sweetest smile he had ever seen in the world.

"Conklin," she said when she let him go, "you know this thing you are going to do is dangerous?"

"Yes."

"You are sure you are going to take care of what to me is more valuable than furs?"

"Oh, if it is your happiness, nothing in the world can defeat me or take from what is yours!"

"I know you'll do it!" she assured him, and he strode forth, jumping from rock to rock across the outlet of the Trembling Leaves and other Bubbling Spring ponds, picking up the footprints of the man who was bearing away on his back the fur taken of a trapper—in a land where stealing a trapper's catch means just one punishment if the thief is caught at it.

CHAPTER XI

THE FUR THIEF OUTFIT

SOON after crossing the outlet of Trembling Leaves, Delos Conklin found where two horses had been tied to trees. Here the fur thief's tracks also displayed the fact that he had made more than one trip to the cabin of Pretty Shells, bringing away the furs she had caught and dressed. From the loading place it was easy trailing for Conklin, and would remain so as long as no storm came to cover the forest with snow.

His first thought was to return for his own saddle horse, but as the way ahead included a climb over a pass whose summit was ten or eleven thousand feet above the sea, and probably five thousand feet higher than the cabin's level, he went on afoot. The difficulties of the packer confirmed the good judgment.

The ground was frozen. Many of the rocks were sheeted with ice. A windfall had laid a wide strip of down timber across the way to the gap over the mountain chain. The thief's two animals had slipped and lunged as they ascended, and after a time, about 2,000 feet higher up, the tracks led into a gulch and came back out at the same place, showing the packer had lost his way. And, moreover, the indication was plain that the fellow had made his raid either in the night or had made a late-day getaway, and had been traveling by guess.

The horses, too, had been far from sure-footed. They had fallen occasionally. Where they had scrambled to their feet Conklin found scrapes and tiny globules which showed that the animals had scratched their legs. From their strides, wherever a little level or easy going allowed it, they had been urged to hurry along.

"He's afraid!" Conklin read the signs, and being loaded with less than thirty pounds himself, he skipped along, scrambling and swinging on his way with the exultant confidence of those who feel sure of themselves.

As the day waned Conklin entered the pass to the east of the major mountain peak of the Singing Birds. He had been over the middle pass miles to the westward, where the way was open at the summit of the timber-line height. He found the eastern pass a deep, gloomy cañon, the bottom filled with débris of broken stone and drifts of snow which had turned to ice. The way was so rough and difficult that only a good horseman could have taken animals through.

Somehow, the thief made the way, though he had been obliged to stop, perhaps to wait for daylight. He had built a fire out of deadwood of dwarfed evergreens which had been brought down into the gulch in slides. The pack of furs had been dropped to the ground near the fireplace. Perhaps the thief had eaten a stick of jerked venison, or a smoked trout, but Conklin could not see that the man had eaten, and the horses certainly had not.

Somewhere along the way Conklin passed the summit, the highest point in the pass, but he could not tell when this happened. He was on the other side, after a time, and the north slope of the Singing Birds pitched down a long way to the upper timber line.

Ahead of him stretched the Disappearing River basin, spotted here and there with snow which had not melted in the storms, and with dark areas of woods which had found root over lower ridges and along the flanks of other lesser ranges. Far to the northward was another barrier range like the Singing Birds, so distant that its green was like dark crystal, its bare tops like pearl shell, and as far as he could see the fur thief pursuer could not see one sign of human occupation, although here and there were low areas of bare valley in which he would doubtless find cow outfits, nesters in the stream bottoms and perhaps the hidden cabins of fugitives from detectives, sheriffs, marshals and other representatives of justice.

The trail of the horses went down the Alpine conditions toward the timber line at a diagonal slope. The route was toward the northeast, and as he looked ahead, Conklin saw that the course was to pick up the back of a buttress ridge, covered with green timber and leading into the heart of the Disappearing Valley. As he reached the upper edge of the woods sunset was at hand, so he picked a place to camp while it was still light enough to see.

The thief had been badly fooled. If it was the fellow who called himself Tom Redding, he had been twice deceived. Conklin, in claiming the trapping territory for his own had insured the peace of the woman, Pretty Shells, until the January thaw, at least. Then the rascal had come over to rob the trapper whose success in catching rich furs had been well assured on account of the countless animal tracks on the south slope where no one had sought pelts in years. And now when he had come to steal, the fellow had found not only a rare collection of prime furs, handled as only Indian women know how to do, but the reassuring fact that he apparently had only to cope with a hermit girl.

He found in Pretty Shells's cabin no sign of any man and every indication of feminine occupancy. On the walls had hung pretty ornaments, bead-work belts and festooned feathers. On the cold floor were thick bear- and autumnal deerskins. The dry skins had been baled neatly and hung from the rafters along the tops of the walls. Beaded short skirts, beautiful buckskin moccasins, waists which had been embroidered and dyed in fanciful designs, gauntlet gloves—There were the countless evidences of constant toil and delight in what is lovely, and amid the colors suggestive of a primitive taste had been, also, the books which might have shown the evidence of a mind which still clung to the chain of intellectual ascent with the rise of civilization. Conklin recalled these things. He knew their meanings. He saw plainly that the thief had not anticipated any masculine presence in the desolation he had traversed.

"They always fool themselves, they deceive their own souls!" Conklin laughed to himself. "He must have expected the very storm gods to cover his trail with snow."

One thing especially indicated that Tom Redding had been the invader, for the pack horse tracks led into the blazed trail which had come down from the mountain crest and crossed the timber belt to the lower edge in the effort to seize the fur-pocket for his own. And when in the morning Conklin went on along the buttress of the ridge he found he was following a real pathway.

Years before, some one had blazed a line along the hog-back. At intervals marten traps were set in cubbies high on the sides of trees to be above the deep snow levels ordinarily prevailing here. Traps were still in the cubbies, ready set for furs, with fresh bait which had been thrown in for lures. The thief was now back in his own country, for the horseman had paused along down to tend these traps.

Going swiftly, Conklin covered ground by the mile. The north slope was rougher, steeper, cut into enormous gorges and broken by the leap down of vast precipices. Whoever he was, Tom Redding had been a good way-finder. His trap-line led over an easy grade through a land where his route was perhaps the only one which would have been feasible to follow in laying down traps for fur.

Within four hours of his start Conklin came to a line cabin in a bench thicket of lodge-pole pines. Here beside a brook had been built a log house with a tight roof of split puncheons, shingles three or four feet long. The camp had been well placed on a low mound. Two or three trees had been felled that they might not be broken down by weight of snow and crash through the roof. The ax-work on the sticks had been good and clean-cut. Within was the disorder and dirt which marks the abiding place or the passing by of a wilderness vagabond, a bunk heaped with messy blankets and a dirty old quilt, dirty dishes on the table where squirrels had toothed the stiff grease of bacon and venison tallow, chunks of partly devoured blue-heavy hot-bread, and a discarded tin pail which had been burst along the seams by ice because the passer-by had forgotten to empty it some time earlier in the season.

Roughly whittled and badly shaped stretching-boards indicated by their stains and numbers that the trapper had in spite of his carelessness caught a good many skins. The various sizes showed he had caught mink, marten, pekan and foxes. Several hoops indicated plainly that he had also taken a number of beaver which would mean heavy fines if the State authorities should happen to catch him at this illicit practise.

Conklin cooked himself a dinner, brewed a cup of coffee and was on his way again in a good deal less than an hour. He had already gained ten or twelve hours on the thief who had schemed well to deprive a fellow trapper of the best of a whole year's work.

Here and there along the trail Conklin found where the fellow had stopped his horses and climbed to some bare knob beside the trap-line, or taken advantage of a chance in some bare height to look back along his trail to see whether there was any pursuer. When Conklin realized the skulker's habit of always watching for pursuit he was startled.

The moment he divined the situation he wondered at his own thoughtlessness. He must be cautious. He could take no chances with the man he was pursuing. Had he been closer to the fellow he might easily have run into a fatal ambush. There was a difference between pursuing even a savage pack of stock-killing wolves and going after a man armed with a heavy, far-reaching rifle and no doubt long familiar with the strategems of sheriff posses and clandestine man-hunting ruses.

The trail grew fresher. Conklin was going twice as fast as the loaded horses. He was light of foot. He had for nearly three months been skipping over the Wolf Den knolls, limbering his body from the limited exercises of ordinary cowboy riding and efforts. He had grown supple in climbing and scrambling about, had become a quicker and stronger man. Now he was at the best he had ever been. He exulted in his agility. There was no denying the barbarous excitement to be had in a man hunt through a mountainous forest to recover booty and exact punishment.

The trail ran down to a lower timber line. A bare valley ten or twelve miles in diameter and nearly circular made him pause to take stock. The little desert had been crossed by the thief riding one horse and leading another. To make a circuit around meant fifteen or twenty miles of rough going. To go across meant revealing himself to any one on the far side who happened to have a pair of good binoculars. Conklin hesitated in the edge of the scattering juniper cedar growth, doubtful what to do.

All along this stranger's line the birds had been shy, watchful, quick to take flight. At the trap cabins none approached without keen, nervous suspicion. Conklin recalled the anxiety of all the south-side feathered tribes, and realized that this fur seeker had shot all he could to use them for trap bait. The cubbies were fluffed with the jays, grouse and other fliers. And so the mountains some one had called the Singing Birds had become the land of frightened living things, even over south where the flocks went to enjoy the sunshine of the warmer slope.

Conklin had nearly two hours of daylight ahead. At ten miles he would hardly be seen, even with ordinary glasses. He took the chance of discovery, and headed straight over the open. He strode along, looking far ahead. It was just possible the thief had not left the pocket-desert. When sunset came, Conklin was within four miles of the north rim, and he recognized the course of the fugitive as leading into a low pass a bit west of north. The horse tracks headed straight for this gap in a range of rounded tops.

With starlight, the pursuer quickened his footsteps. He did not need to pick up the hoofprints of the horses. Neither did he have to worry about being seen by the man ahead. He knew for certain the thief had gone to the woods beyond, in the mountain gap—and Conklin would, if he kept on, find the camp somewhere through that wilderness ahead. The trap-line cabins would be about eighteen to twenty-two miles apart in this kind of country. Therefore the next cabin was within five miles at the most, and probably this side of the summit ahead.

Conklin began the new ascent at a moderate rate. He did not feel fatigue. He had come nearly thirty miles, yet in the excitement of approaching crisis he did not think of his mileage. He was still light of foot. He was alert. He was watchful in the starlit night, for anywhere ahead he might discover either the trap-line cabin or its gleaming light. And he listened sharply at intervals for the scuffling of horses grazing through the junipers and striking their hooves against the worn stones.

The sides of the pass grew steeper. The perpendicular tree-trunks stood at a sharper angle on the slopes. This was a pretty gap through a low and attractive mountain range. It was great ranch country. And there were cattle about. The quick ears of the trailer heard a heifer mooing almost under her breath not far off to the westward.

Conklin had not expected a ranch. He came to a barbed wire fence in the narrows. a few posts set across the bottom. No cow could go along either side because it was so steep. At the gate the trapper hesitated. After all, the trap-line cabin was beyond the summit of this mountain ridge. Instead of a mere camp it was probably a real ranch. And that kind of outfit was sure to have dogs.

"I'll have to locate it!" he told himself, and lifting the chain fastening, he went through the gateway. He turned to close the swing. Then the second step he took a bear trap clanged under his foot, the jaws closing on the thick leather of his laced hunting boots five inches or so above his ankle. The blow was terrific, yet numbed his leg rather than tortured it.

There was a muffled ringing from the released springs, but Conklin did not utter a sound. He stood still, knowing now how wolves feel when caught in full career by exactly similar engines of relentless seizure. Never in his life had Conklin contemplated or dreamed of being in such a predicament, but he was not quite unprepared for it. He did not jump. He hardly flinched. He could not tell on the instant whether his leg was broken or not. But he knew that if the successful man-trapper found him there, he could expect no more mercy than a wolf caught under similiar circumstances. Surprized and shocked, the victim of human cunning which had anticipated the possibility of swift pursuit, Conklin nevertheless almost instantly recovered his equilibrium.

He dropped on his free knee and ran his hand along the underside of the jawed machine. He found the trap was an old-timer. It had two springs on each jaw.

Taking off his leather belt, he wound it twice around one of the right-hand side springs and a little at a time drew the strap until he had sprung the inner of the V-spring ends together. Then he took his inevitable cord and tied the spring in place. He drew the other three springs open in the same way and so took their strain from the pillars of the two jaws. He pulled them apart and lifted his foot out.

He leaned his back against the gate post for a few minutes while he shook his foot, rejoicing to find that he had no broken bone with which to contend. The ache of the bruise was throbbing and painful but far from overwhelming.

Never had Delos Conklin felt such anger as now surged through him. He was not inflamed so much as he was cooled and awakened. He had in a dim way foreseen difficulty, perhaps a gun fight, but his anticipation had not included bear traps set in the trail. Conklin reset the trap where it had been buried, wrapped in a piece of burlap bagging, in the pathway through the gap at the end of the gate, right where any one coming through would be sure to step upon the pan. He covered the trap over with sand, brushing out the prints of his feet through the opening.

By the glow of the starlight he could see the man tracks around the trap, as if they had been made to "look natural." He made some natural tracks, too, glad that his own boots were about the size of the trap-setter's.

Then, prodding the ground ahead of him, he avoided the cattle paths and went on through the narrow pass, climbed out at the side where the gorge flattened out. From a clump of junipers he looked down on just such a ranch outfit as he might have anticipated.

A small corral, a dug-out log cabin against the side hill, a natural water-hole with a trickle from a good spring running down the little valley, and nothing else. Above the fireplace chimney was a rosy glow against the blue smoke. Two horses were in the corral.

Conklin surveyed the starlit scene with caution. He had still-hunted to the den of his barbarous quarry. He wondered how many were in the pack. He looked anxiously for dogs. He listened for the sound of their whimpering or other sounds of uneasiness. Except for the scuffling of the horses, eating fodder thrown in for them, he heard no least sound.

Then he saw a cougar creeping down the bare slope only fifty or sixty feet distant. Crouching, watchful, careful, the big cat circled nearer. The other skulker stood fascinated and delighted by that visitor. He held his finger in his mouth for a minute, and then reached it a little higher than his head. The drift of the air, as told by the cooling on the north side of his finger, showed that the cougar was approaching against the wind into the ranch ground. It went down to the corral, hesitated as it crouched and then bounded lightly over the high fence and the next instant there was an agonized shriek from one of the animals within.

CHAPTER XII

CLOSE OF THE CAMPAIGN

A FORTUITOUS incident had given Delos Conklin a curious opportunity. Wild creatures are always sneaking around the isolated cabins and camps of men. Coyotes come to their camp-fires, cougars even walk with humans in the dark, and many a bear has gone into a shack in the search of adventure, information or something to eat. Conklin could have shouted aloud for joy when he heard the uproar when the foolish young but full-grown cougar took a chance at attacking the penned-in horses.

The horses were range ponies, long-haired and tough. They had climbed through mountain forests and scrambled across miles on miles of broken stone above and below timber lines. The two were old pals. At that first shriek of astonished pain the two animals went into action. The alarm of the first neigh became a mad anger of hate and self-defense. The horse which saw its friend assailed bucked to the rescue with tail up, mane flying and mouth wide open, snorting with rage.

Conklin darted closer. He saw the front door of the dug-out in the side hill flung open. The light of the fireplace showed a man coming out rifle in hand—and only one man. And the fellow was Tom Redding, unquestionably. He rushed to the corral gate just as the shrill snarls of the now embattled cat screamed above the mêlée of thumping hooves and yelling horses.

Redding stood with his rifle poised, looking through the interstices of the gate trying to get a shot at the invader. Conklin ran down through the loose sand and up behind him, rifle ready.

The charging horses crashed against the corral fence, first on one side, then on the other. They surged against the gate and the owner sprang back, partly turning, as the three brutes came through the flimsy barrier. Redding, turning partly, saw Conklin within fifteen feet.

There was no pause, no least moment of hesitation. The thief's rifle muzzle swung around in a hip-point. Delos Conklin had never been closer to death than in that instant when the desperado, who had come to protect his stock from a big cat and had found a man, must have believed that it had been merely a ruse to bring him out of his hiding place.

The rifles went off practically simultaneously. Conklin had the advantage of having come with his weapon pointed, ready. The other's long, heavy .33 caliber slug passed in a hiss of coiling wind, so close that it raised a scorch bruise on the side of Conklin's neck. Conklin's own .30-30 projectile went true and the mushrooming tore through heart and backbone, killing its victim where he stood.

Conklin ran to the cabin to make sure no one else was there. He found only a single bunk in the disorder of the hermit's house. The horses and cougar went off down the valley, still fighting. Thus had come to the climax the fur-thief pursuit.

Pain where the trap jaws had bumped told of swelling bruise and outraged bone and muscle. It drew Conklin's mind from the tragedy in which he was now the principal figure. He pulled off his boots and went to work on the injury. A bottle of balsam which Redding had gathered for some similar injury was on a split-log mantel. Conklin covered the closed wound with a thick coating and then wrapped the injury with strips torn from a cotton shirt which hung on an antler prong pegged to the log wall.

In the corner were the bundles of packed furs. Hanging from wires along the same end of the cabin were the thief's own catch—a large array of pelts, but they had not been handled with the same skill or care as those he had stolen over on the south side of the Singing Birds.

Conklin poked around in the things piled up along the walls of the ranch-house. There were two old saddles, a bale of wire, a score of magazines the covers of which had nearly all been worn off, and in one corner a badly worn suitcase. In this were two suits of "city clothes," and a handful of rumpled clippings, which described sundry crimes. There were four reward notices, such as are fastened with thumbtacks to the bulletin boards in post-offices and on hooks in sheriff and police chief headquarters.

"George Caven, alias Robert Skeens, alias Scraggly Jim Flenk" were the names in one such list. One picture was that of "Tom Redding" before he needed a shave, when he was wearing white collar and business men's suit. Another showed him as he stood with handcuffs, an open shirt, bare and tousle-headed, just as he had been rounded up by a sheriff's and detective's posse three years previous as he fled after holding up the Moss Agate Savings Bank. One of the clippings explained his presence here in the far foothills to the north of the Singing Bird.

The reward offered was five hundred dollars, the same as for killing one of the Lop-Ear band of wolves. The fact made Conklin cringe. He could not feel successful as he thought of the dead man lying out there by the corral. He had had no choice in that duel but to aim to kill. The moment had been one of life or life—but it left the victor in a grim mood of self-analysis.

He carried out a wagon-top tarpaulin and spread it over the body, weighing down the sides with cobbles. He walked with a good deal of difficulty, limping. At the same time he was lucky beyond measure. Had the jaws struck unevenly, or a right-and-left blow, instead of exactly opposite his leg bone would surely have been broken—and here he was sixty or seventy miles back in the wilderness at the least, a country more than a hundred miles from any settlement, in all probability.

He dragged in a cedar stump to keep the fire going. He sat before the blaze, keeping his hurt leg warm, unable to think of sleeping on account of the ache. In the morning he could eat. He looked the country over from the doorway. Even in the soft light of night he could see at least a hundred miles toward the north, and it was all alike—woods, opens, the Disappearing River bottoms far away. To this place the bandit had retreated, only to be overtaken when he could not be honest even with a fellow trapper.

There was no sign that any one had ever come here but the fugitive. He had five or six horses. The fence above the cabin had been built to keep fifteen or twenty head of cattle over in the valley at the foot of the Singing Birds. When during the day Conklin looked these animals over he found three Bell Brand steers and four other brands, strays which had come wandering up here close enough for the man who was hiding out to think it worth while to hold them, hoping perhaps to raise stock and after a time pass for an honest rancher down at some general store and post-office in the Disappearing River valley.

By daylight Conklin found three traps set at the pass fence gate, including the one which had tripped him. He brought them down to the cabin and hung them up. He didn't know what to do. He had committed no crime, yet he was involved in a pretty bad business. A killing is never pleasant to acknowledge, even if justified. Surely, the account was fully settled with the fur thief. That was really the only concern Conklin had in the matter.

Obliged to wait while his leg grew less painful, he thought it over. He shuddered at the thought of going out the long trail with the grisly burden. He decided at last what he would do. A few weeks previous he had built a cairn for the covering of a wolf which had excited his admiration and compassion. With less good-will he now wrapped his human victim in the tarred canvas and gave him a grave and a similar monument. He knew, when he had done this, that the man would have preferred it so. The less said, the better. But Conklin put all the clippings and the reward notices into a bottle, stoppered it tightly with a cork well sealed in with balsam mixed with sand, and placed the marks of identification into the heap of stone, taking care to make the enclosure safe from pressure.

He opened the fence to let the cattle have free range whither they would. He managed to catch one of the two horses that had been fighting with the cougar. Then he rode, and caught two others, one of which he gentled for his own riding, and the other for the packs of furs. He took all the skins, of course.

He surmised that the bandit might have hidden his loot somewhere in the neighborhood. When he examined the cartridge and revolver belt hanging by the bunk where the man had slept he found three money pockets. There was nearly five hundred dollars in small bills in the slots. No use to waste this!

Conklin was glad to head back over the Singing Birds. He had watched the sky anxiously, fearing that a blizzard might cover the high passes with deep snow. A squall whitened the country from timber line to timber line over the crest, but the horses easily waded through the scant fifteen inches of snow, and two thousand feet higher than Trembling Leaves pond the ground became bare again.

He led his horses most of the way, in spite of his hurt leg. But he could ride enough at times to rest the injury. He came down to the cabin of Pretty Shells late in the afternoon. He supposed of course she had gone on into the Bell Brand ranch as he had suggested she do.

Instead she opened the door and ran out on the sand at the edge of the woods to look, when she heard the thumping and bumping of horses' hooves on the frozen ground against stones. She met him where he crossed the brook outlet. She looked at the big pack on the horse. She saw that he dropped to his knees when he swung down from his saddle, cringing with the hurt. She ran to him, her face pale and lips trembling.

"Shot?" she asked, looking through tears at his boot.

"No—trapped!" he shook his head, his smile a little twisted with pain, but a right happy look in his eyes. "I brought your furs."

She put her finger over his lips, giving warning.

"Don't talk about the furs, please! I know you had to go to avenge your woman," her face flushed crimson, "and not just to bring the furs."

She studied his set features; she knew the fur country—that there must have been a tragedy; she bit her quivering lip.

"Oh, I'm so sorry you had to do it!" she whispered. "Your heart suffers at the necessity you were under to do so dreadful, so tragic a thing! I'm sorry— But I had to let you go. My man had to go!"

"I did not expect to find you here." He looked at her in fond reproof.

"No?" she laughed, softly. "Where else would I wait for you, except in my own home?"

"But I might have gone around the other way!"

"How long would you have remained at the Bell Brand ranch if you had not found me there?" she inquired.

"You—you wanted me to come here for you?" he laughed. "Well, I've come."

"I know!" she nodded brightly. "I knew you would."

So they rejoiced in the place to which necessity had brought them. They supped on the best that Pretty Shells could cook. They talked of many things. First of all, of packing Pretty Shells, furs and bags and baggage back to civilization. Then he wondered if he could call his wolf campaign finished with two of the band still at large?

"I have news for you," she told him. "When I went down to look after your horses I saw two wolves passing through the junipers below the thick timber. They were traveling, I'm sure—Leaving the country! One was slim and light of weight, the other dark, mottled black and lustrous."

"You were not far from them!" he suggested.

"Not far!" she admitted. "Close enough to see their tongues in their mouths. As they raced they looked over their shoulders at their back trail. They were frightened. They ran close together. I could tell it was not a case of going somewhere, but of leaving some tragic terror behind them. I doubt if ever they will return, or even stop till they are far beyond the range of Tribulation."

"They had found where their mates were destroyed," he nodded. "No, they'll never go back to the Wolf Dens. They'll go far, perhaps be travelers instead of circlers now. Lobos, probably even coyotes, become vagabonds."

"Then you're not going to keep on looking for them?" she asked, her voice suppressed in its tone. "You're going to settle down?"

"I'm going to be anything you want me to be!" he exclaimed. "I could have no choice in that. I do not want ever to disappoint you."

"Oh, white man!" she whispered. "If only I can elevate myself to deserve that trust of yours!"

He laughed, and presently they packed their horses and went riding off down the trail which led them to the Bell Brand ranch. And seeing them coming from afar, Wool-Head Plack and a little red-haired woman rode out to meet them, giving them jubilant welcome.

And that night at the ranch-house the boys spread out the wolf hides. They turned four of these over and over in their hands, smoothing down the coarse hair and holding them up to let the lamplight shine on them.

"This range'll not be the same with them all gone!" Park Cable said reflectively. "They sure tied to a heap of history and romping in their day."

"Yes," Pretty Shells added, leaning to take hold of the elbow of her sweetheart. "And you'll never know the most of it, either!"

"That's so!" Wool-Head nodded. "I reckon the biggest part of what those scoundrels did won't never be told, for a fact!"

END

At Eliza's

By

W. Townend

THERE are times when fate forces us to intervene in the affairs of other people. We are granted a glimpse into their secrets; we concern ourselves with their troubles; willingly would we help; willingly would we know more. The episode closes swiftly and the end is hidden.

In this respect life seems less satisfactory than fiction. So often there is no conclusion to our story.

To revive memories of his dead youth, so he explained, Mr. MacPherson, the second engineer of the *Sparhawk*, suggested that they should leave the Piazza De Ferrari and drop in at Eliza's on the Via Milano for a last drink on their way back to the ship. And it was in the long room at the back of Eliza's bar that the trouble between Challas, the third engineer, who was not originally one of the party at all, and Brearly, the second mate, came to a head.

It is unlikely, however, that they would have fought but for the arrival of the elderly man who sought for a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff.

Also there was the beachcomber.

As soon as the second engineer and the mate and the second mate had entered the long room and seated themselves at a table; Eliza had borne down on them, joyfully exclaiming. She was glad they had come, so glad they did not know! Eventually, as it turned out, she was still more glad when they left.

"I remember-a you!" she said. "All of you! Ever-a one!"

The mate looked at the second mate whose first trip it was to Genoa and winked.

"Why you no been to see-a me before, hey?" said Eliza.

"No time," said the mate. "We're busy men, Eliza!"

Eliza's dark little eyes twinkled; her thin, sallow face was contorted by a spasm that implied incredulity and scorn.

"Busy! You nevaire busy! You no come here now an' see-a me, no gooda enough, hey?"

"Eliza," said the second engineer, "we're puir men, ye ken! We're scairt the sicht o' your fatal beauty wull tempt us to spend mair than we can afford!"

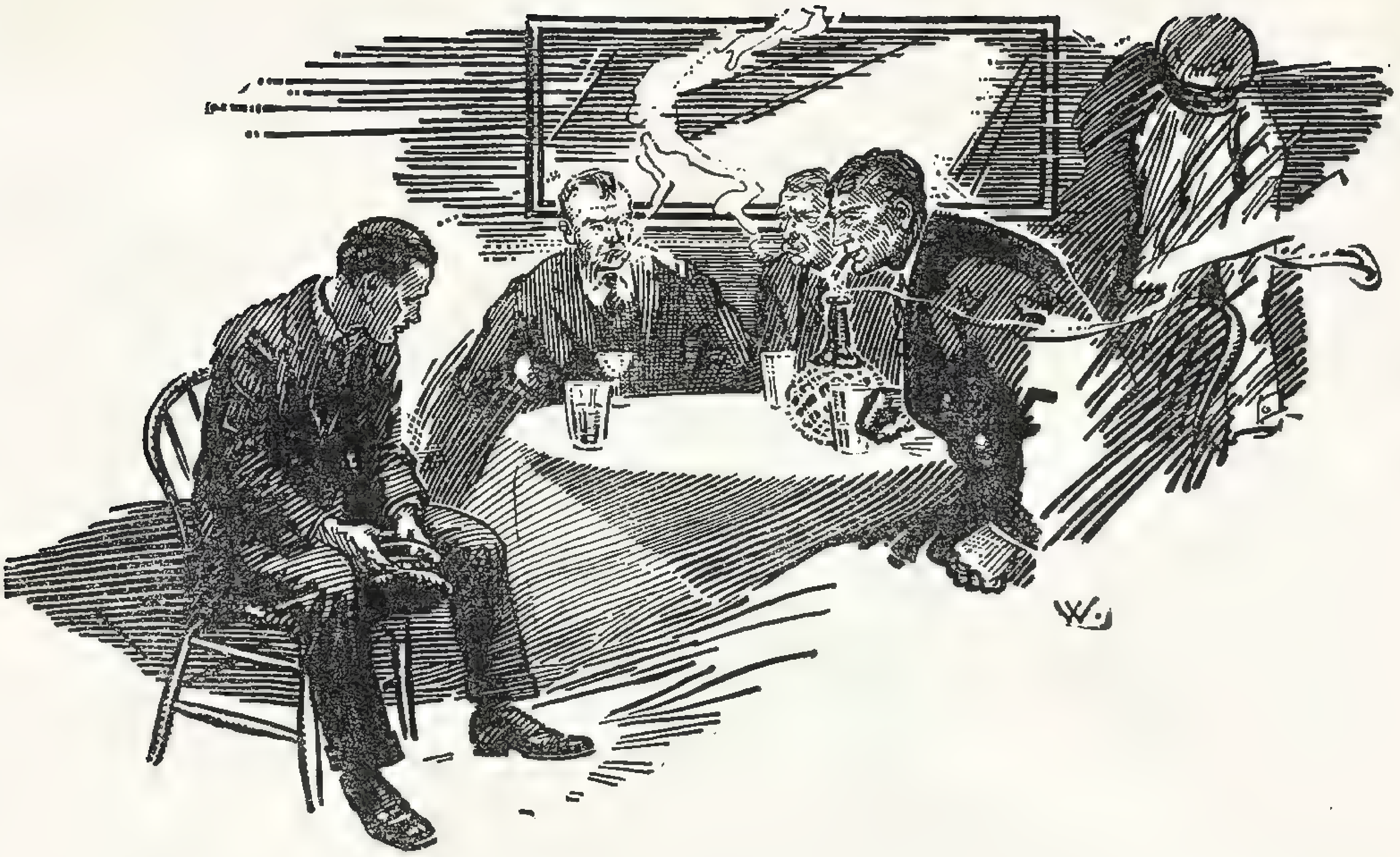
Eliza broke into shrill laughter.

"Fatal-a beauty! Vhat is zat, hey? Oh, meester, you beeg-a liar!" She checked her laughter and became a business woman once more. "Vhat you have-a to dreenk, hey?"

"Lager," said the mate. "Three bottles." He held up three fingers. "And, Eliza, my dear, none of your old sailortown games with me! Savvy sailortown? I know what lager is, if the others don't!"

Eliza bustled off, cackling.

"Gittin' auld, the lot of us," said the second engineer, "but Eliza's the same noo as she was fufteen year syne; she hasna changit yin iota!"



The night was hot; the long room was uncomfortably crowded and noisy and stuffy; the atmosphere was tainted with the smell of stale beer and whisky and tobacco smoke and moist humanity. Men from the ships in port sat at the small round marble-topped tables and talked and laughed and shouted and drank their drinks, while on a small platform at the far end of the room two dark-haired girls played guitars and an elderly man with a cold in his head thumped out an accompaniment on a jangly piano much in need of being tuned.

"If Eliza hasn't changed," said the mate, "no more has her bar! I remember that old bird playing the piano here, Mr. MacPherson, five, six years before the war. Lord! what a life, eh!"

"Eliza hasna wastit much money on the decorations, onyway," said Mr. MacPherson. "I wunner when she last had the place pentit!"

"It's not that she's hard up, either," said the mate.

"Ye're richt, Mr. Stocker! Eliza cud retire on a fortune the noo if she wantit, I bet! I mind her tellin' auld MacLeod, chief o' the *Blanquilla*, that she had hauf her money investit in British shippin'. She sold oot twa years efter the war before the slump fur double what she'd pit in! Aye, ye'd ha'e to git up vera early the morn' to git the better of Eliza, I'm tellin' ye!"

"Shouldn't have thought there was much money in a dump like this!" said the second mate presently.

"Shows how little you know, then!" said the mate.

"Things arena sae guid in Genoa as they used to be, onyway," said the second engineer. "I mind the time when the harbor here was crowdit wi' British ships an' ye cudna move yin fit in the toon withoot fa'in' ower a drunken Englishman, if ye didna fa' ower a drunken Scotsman first."

"Aye," said the mate, "but for all that, Mr. MacPherson, Eliza's better than most of them. She's an old robber, o' course, but she has her points, I'll say that for her!"

"Then you're not saying much, Mr. Stocker!"

They turned and saw the third engineer, a heavily built young man with bristly black hair and sharp brown eyes that were a shade too small for the width of his face and a smile that seemed at first sight insincere, or if not insincere, assumed for some purpose of his own.

Without being asked he drew up a chair and sat down.

"Well!" he said. He looked at the second engineer, then at the mate. The second mate he ignored. "Nice little family party, eh? That's good! Enjoying yourselves! I'm glad!" He snapped his fingers at a passing waitress. "Here, Anna, or whatever your name is, more drinks! Mr. Stocker, Mr. MacPherson, what's it to be? Lager again, eh! Four bottles of lager, Gertrude, and look slippy about it!"

The third engineer leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

"And here's the second mate! As large as life and twice as natural, as they used to say! Well, well! Surprized to find you here, Mr. Brearly; thought your particular beat was the Mission and hymn singin' in that beautiful high tenor o' yours! I'm surprized and, to tell you the truth, I'm hurt. I had faith in you, Mr. Brearly, the simple faith of a little child! You've destroyed an ideal!"

The second mate wondered why Challas always seemed to go out of his way to make himself disagreeable! On board the *Sparhawk*, unlike so many other tramps, the relations between bridge and engine-room were so cordial, so intimate, even, that Challas' hostility was all the more conspicuous and inexplicable.

"You wudna find a mair respectable bar in all Genoa than Eliza's, mister," said Mr. MacPherson, "so for once in your life, dry up!"

The third engineer smiled and puffed out a cloud of cigaret smoke and said:

"When I was young and pure-minded, Mr. MacPherson, not like young Brearly here, who's a wolf in sheep's clothing, I wouldn't have let myself be seen in a bar, respectable or not respectable, at this time o' night! And drinking beer, too! Mr. Brearly, I'm grieved. My old mother said to me once: 'Wullie, always judge a man by his companions!' Now, Mr. Brearly, you think well before you answer! Are you a fit companion for any reputable mate or second engineer? You're not, and in your heart you know it! Beer drinking at your age and leading elderly married men astray! I'm ashamed of you!"

The mate grinned.

"Mr. Challas, you talk too much!"

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson, "a —— sicht tae much! Ye mak' me sick!"

The third engineer paid for the beer which the girl brought and went on talking.

"Yes, Brearly, I know what you're thinking! I'm coarse and I'm vulgar. Don't you hate being seen out with me? You do, I'm sure! But I'm only an engineer, Brearly! That explains everything, don't it? Don't be too 'ard on me! A poor, 'umble, 'ard-working engineer, an outcast, with no pretensions to good manners or culture or breeding or anything decent! It's 'orrible having to associate with a roughneck like me, ain't it? But don't be downhearted. There's hope for me yet. The more I study you, the more chance I have of being a better man. I'll tell you a secret: Each morning when I get up I look at myself in the glass and having got over the shock—painful first thing, I assure you—I say: 'Wullie, every day and in every way you got to be more like Mr. Brearly! Every day and in every way you got to be more like Mr. Brearly! Every day—' And so on! You've noticed the improvement, haven't you? Mr. MacPherson, you have, of course. I don't drop my aitches now, do I? Not noticeably, any'ow! I don't put my knife into my mouth at table, do I? And all through modeling myself on the second mate! A gent if ever there was one!"

The second mate listened gravely, neither smiling, nor yet showing the least sign of resentment. He did not care particularly what Challas said, but he was not amused. He did not like him; he did not know why. He had wanted to be friendly, but Challas's manner had been definitely hostile from the very first. Sometimes he almost felt that he was trying to goad him into some kind of fight or other. If so, he reflected, he would be disappointed.

Not that he was afraid of Challas, in spite of his strength. He wasn't. At least, he did not think so. But fighting between grown men and for no reason at all was stupid. And so he listened to what Challas said and wondered idly what he had done to make him dislike him and why couldn't the swine leave him alone and not force his company on some one he so obviously despised!

He realized all at once that Challas was leaning forward across the table, leering at him and asking some question—

"What's that?" Brearly said.

"I wanted to know, Brearly, why ever you put your pride in your pocket and came to sea! Tell us what you thought when you found yourself aboard ship for the first time and saw what kind of toughs you had as shipmates! Made you sick, didn't it, as Mr. MacPherson would say? If it did, I don't blame you! I feel that way myself often!"

Challas threw back his head and shouted.

Brearly saw that the second engineer and the mate were looking at him in a way that puzzled him. Their faces were very serious; they seemed almost, as it were, subdued and unhappy. Suddenly he was ashamed, not of himself, but of Challas.

And then Challas said:

"No, he never gets angry, gents! You couldn't get angry with a feller you look down on, same as he looks down on me, could you? He's too much a gent! See him now! Perfect command over his features. The aristocracy don't show their feelings. It ain't done. I read that in a book, Mr. MacPherson, so it's true. Proud, too! See him go pink!" Challas called to the waitress who was passing. "Anna, good-looking boy, my young friend, ain't he?"

"Ver' good-a look!" said the girl. She put the empty bottles on to her tray. "You no' good-a look! You look like-a you wanta some beer!"

"My shout!" said the mate. He wished the third engineer would let the second mate alone. He wished still more that the second mate would give Challas a swipe over the jaw and tell him to shut up.

"Never gets angry," said Challas. "Doesn't know how!" His smile faded and his expression was suddenly sour and ill-humored. "Brearly, if any one spoke to me like I speak to you, I'd knock his head off!"

"If he'd let you," said the second mate quietly.

The waitress brought the drinks. The mate paid and said, with an affectation of being quite at his ease:

"Drink up and then we must go! It's getting late!"

"Mister," said a hoarse voice, "for the love o' Gawd, give us the price of a meal! I'm on the beach, mister, starvin' for want of a crust of bread!"

A MAN stood by the table; unshaven, his chin covered by a growth of reddish fair hair, his face white and blotchy, his long nose bulbous, pink pouches under his red-rimmed eyes, his clothes dirty and much too large for him, the knees of his trousers torn and white flesh showing, no collar around his scraggy neck, a sodden, misshapen cap on the back of his head. He swayed on his feet and his breath stank of stale liquor.

The mate recoiled from him.

"Here," he said sharply, "what the —— do you want here? Out of it!"

"Gimme the price of a meal, guv'nor! Have some pity! I'm a sailor, I am. A.B. Me ship went without me. I was—hic!—ill, guv'nor!"

He rested his hands on the round-topped table.

"If you don't get away from here," said the mate, "I'll lay you out!"

The second mate had been watching the man's face. There was in his expression a kind of sick horror that showed that he realized to a degree, perhaps, the extent of his degradation.

"Poor devil!" he thought.

"Shouldn't be surprized if he really is ill," he said. "He looks it!"

Eliza arrived swiftly.

"Get outa here!" she screamed. "Get outa here or I send for da police! What-a you want? Outa da way, you low bum!"

The second mate put his hand in his pocket and groped for a coin.

"Here!" he said.

"Dinna ye be a foo'!" said Mr. MacPherson. "Keep your money!"

"—— the lot of you!" said the beachcomber thickly.

Eliza stamped her foot.

"Outa here, you low bum!"

The beachcomber snarled at her out of the corner of his mouth and staggered, then turning he thrust the flat of his hand hard against the second mate's face, so hard that his head was jerked backward roughly and a twinge of pain in his throat made him choke.

"That's for you, you pup! Keep yer —— money, then!"

Challas growled—

"Did you see that, fellers!"

"Outa here!" stormed Eliza. "You hear me, or I call-a da police!"

The beachcomber, already shuffling toward the curtain that draped the entrance to the bar, stopped.

"I'm goin', blast you!" he said. He scowled at the men seated at the tables. "Call yerselves Englishmen, do you! Blasted pack o' dagoes would be more like men—hic!—'n you are! First man that touches me—un'stan'!—I'll cut the liver out of! Un'stan'! I'm not 'fraid o' you, don' think it!"

He was like an animal, trapped but still capable of mischief, if handled without caution. His red-rimmed eyes expressed helpless rage, his coarse lips lifted and revealed great yellow fangs and pale grayish gums.

Tears trickled down his blotchy cheeks.

"There isn't one o' you man enough to pity a poor sailor down an' out through no fault o' his own!" His voice rose to a shout. "On the beach I am an' none o' you'll help me, you bloody curs! Starvin' I am, an' you don't care!"

The third engineer stood up.

"You want a —— good hiding! If the second mate is afraid to touch you, I'm not!"

And then a short, square man who sat at another table bounded to his feet, caught the beachcomber by the back of his coat collar and the seat of his trousers, swung him about and threw him. The beachcomber stumbled and fell full length on to the floor.

There was a shout of laughter in which Eliza joined heartily.

"Outa here, you beeg bum!" she cackled. "Outa here, or I call-a da police!"

The beachcomber shambled out, cursing, blubbering, wiping his eyes with his greasy cap—mankind degraded to the lowest possible level.

At the curtain he stopped once more and screeched:

"To —— with the lot o' you!"

The second engineer of the *Sparhawk* clucked his tongue.

"That's what they're like efter they gang on the beach! God! It's awfu' to see them!"

"It is," said the mate. "An' that's the kind that'll hang around the coal wharves at night and give you a knock on the head as you're going aboard! I always say the most poisonous kind of beachcomber you'll find is the down-and-out Englishman! Gives you a bad taste in your mouth to see a man like that, doesn't it!"

"Bad a' the way through!"

"Strikes me I've seen that particular bird before somewhere!"

"Aye, he's been aroon' the place some time. I wunner they dinna ship him back hame!"

They became aware that the second mate and the third engineer were once more quarreling, in low voices, bitterly, venomously.

"You're a —— coward, Mr. Brearly. Excuses won't wash any more. You're a —— coward!"

"You wouldn't have had me hit a poor devil like him, would you, Mr. Challas? What was the use?"

"The use! ——! The swine put his filthy hand flat on your face and just about broke your neck and you don't do a —— thing! I'd be ashamed of myself, if I were you!"

"Well, you're not me!" said the second mate. "So perhaps you'll kindly mind your own business!"

His anger was rising at last. —— Challas!

Challas spoke to the mate and the second engineer.

"Mr. Stocker, Mr. MacPherson, did you see that? Brearly here was going to give that beachcomber a lira, because he was sorry for him, and the beachcomber —— nearly laid him out, and he didn't lick him! What d'you make of it, eh? Our second mate! Nice example, isn't he?"

The second mate drank some beer and tried to steady himself.

The mate stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Mr. Challas, why are you always picking on the second, eh?"

Challas's face was red. He said gruffly:

"Do you mean, Mr. Stocker, why did I inflict my company on you? What you really mean is I'm not wanted! Is that it?"

"Mean nothing of the kind," said the mate. "Don't you go looking for trouble or offense where none's intended, see? What makes you dislike Mr. Brearly, eh?"

"Dislike Mr. Brearly!" said the third engineer. He raised his eyebrows and looked very surprized. "Why, Mr. Stocker, whatever put that idea into your mind? I don't dislike him. I admire him. I regard him as a pattern for all roughnecks! That's what I keep telling him. Mr. Brearly is everything that's refined and elegant and—shall we say—ladylike!"

"Some day you'll say too much, Challas," said the second mate. "Maybe I'm soft, but I'm not quite so soft as maybe you think!"

Challas grinned at him and uttered a short laugh.

"Mr. Stocker, and you, Mr. MacPherson, did either of you ever hear the story of the second mate helping a poor girl in New York last trip? He met her on Fifth Avenue and Broadway at Twenty-third. She stopped and spoke to him and he —— near took to his heels he was so scared, but she grabbed hold of his arm. She said she was in trouble, would he help her? She'd come into New

York from the country, somewhere over in New Jersey, she didn't know her way about and she'd had her hand bag pinched! What should she do? She was a stranger and his face was so kind! Could he help her? She hadn't the price of her railway ticket, she'd lost her baggage checks and she was going through to her husband who was in a hospital up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. If she didn't reach there, she'd maybe never see him again alive. Brearly was too sorry for words. He —— near cried! He gave her twenty dollars. If he'd had two hundred, it'd have been just the same—she'd have had it. He was never so touched in all his life, he said. He wasn't, though he didn't know it then! The girl was grateful. She'd never forget what he'd done, she told him. He offered to see her to her train, poor little thing! She had to go into a store and buy something—would he wait! Wait! Why, of course he'd wait! Wonder to me is he isn't waiting there now! One of New York's permanent attractions! The girl went in one door and out another. And then he says he isn't as soft as maybe I think!"

Challas shouted with laughter. The mate and the second engineer laughed, too, not quite so boisterously.

"I thought she was speaking the truth," said the second mate. He thought for a moment. The memory of what had happened was still raw. He said then, "How did you know about it, Mr. Challas?"

"How did I know," said Challas, spluttering. "——! Didn't I arrange the whole thing? Wasn't it my idea? You said, don't you remember, no hard luck story would ever get by you, if it wasn't genuine! You could always detect a fraud!"

"You scored," said the second mate. "Yes, Mr. Challas, you certainly scored. Cheap way of amusing yourself, wasn't it?"

"Not too —— cheap for you, was it?" said Challas.

"Mr Challas," said the second engineer dryly, "what fur didna ye tell us thon story afore?"

"Lord knows!" said Challas.

"I know, too," said the second engineer. "Ye were —— weel ashamed o' yersel', that's why! It's a peety ye didna keep quiet aboot it the noo!"

"Bout time we were moving, Mr. MacPherson!" said the mate.

Eliza stood by their table.

"You havin' a good-a time, Meester Mate?" she said.

Challas, his face still red, jerked his thumb toward the second mate.

"See him, Eliza! He thinks sailors spend too much of their money here! He'd like to get your bar closed! That's the truth, Eliza! He doesn't like to see fellows enjoying themselves!"

"Wha's zat you say?" said Eliza.

"Oh, chuck it, mister!" said the mate. "You're not funny any more. A little o' your brand o' humor goes a long way. Eliza, he's pulling your leg!"

"How you say—pull my laig! Vhat a fonny zing to do! Make fun, hey?" She patted the second mate on the head. "You good-a boy, hey!"

Some one called her and she waddled off.

One of the girls was singing in a flat, uninteresting voice. The old man who played her accompaniment on the jangling piano began to sneeze violently. He continued to play, his wrinkled face expressing his mortification and alarm.

Challas rolled a piece of paper into a tight and narrow square; this he bent double. He then drew from his waistcoat pocket a piece of elastic which he slid through the folded paper. He held the ends of the paper between his teeth and the ends of the elastic between finger and thumb of either hand and pulled. When the elastic was stretched to about three times its proper length, he opened his mouth. The cube of paper shot through the air and hit the pianist on the back of the neck.

The music faltered; the old man twisted his head about and scowled and chattered and sneezed. The girl who was singing stopped, then, very pink in the face, went on again.

Challas leaned back in his chair and roared.

"See that!" he said. "Never been known to miss. I learned that at school!"

"It's not clever, wherever you learned it!" said the second mate huskily. "It's not funny, either!"

"When I want your opinion, Brearly," said Challas, "I'll ask for it! Until then you'll keep your —— mouth shut, or I'll make you!"

"You won't!" said the second mate.

He smiled but he kept his gaze fixed on Challas's broad, red face with its short, snub nose and narrow eyes. He must fight at last. The evening would end in the brawl he dreaded: a scrap in a waterfront dive, and for no reason, save that Challas hated him and had been doing his best to fasten a quarrel on him for weeks. He hated the thought of having to fight in a place like this, but he wasn't afraid of Challas, big as he was. He'd fight, if he had to fight, and fight hard!

AND then, while he and Challas watched each other warily, neither saying a word, both waiting, the mate broke the tension by a sudden laugh:

"Heavens above! What's this blown in?"

An elderly man of about sixty or sixty-five, dressed in a neat but not very well-fitting suit of blue serge, stood looking about him uncertainly, as if not quite sure whether he was where he wanted to be.

He was of middle height, rather bent in the back and thin. His face was pale, with prominent cheek bones and an angular jaw. Deep set, pale gray eyes peered out from under gray-tufted eyebrows. His nose was large and angular, his mouth was hidden by a big gray mustache. He was very bald. His neck was long and sinewy. He looked like a retired little business man who had made some money and was traveling abroad for the first time in his life. He was as much out of place in Eliza's as he would have been on the bridge of a tramp steamer in a Western Ocean gale.

Suddenly he seemed aware of the heads that were turned toward him and the smiles and subdued laughter. He dropped into a chair at a table near where the mates and engineers of the *Sparhawk* sat. He fumbled with his soft brimmed gray hat and shuffled his big feet and cleared his throat nervously.

One of the girls, the dark, plump girl the men knew vaguely as Anna, came and stood by his table, a hand on one hip, and eyed him scornfully. When he did not speak she said sharply—

"Vell, meester, whata you have, hey?"

He looked at her vacantly and she tittered.

"What the ——'s he?" said the mate.

"On a Cook's tour, mebbe," said Mr. MacPherson, "an' lost!"

"I'd be obliged if you'd bring me some lemonade," said the man with the big nose and the fierce eyebrows.

The girl looked startled. Few people asked for lemonade at Eliza's.

"Lemonade, citron, grenadine, anything you've got!" said the man with the big nose. He scowled at the beer-slopped table in front of him.

"I've a good mind to wake him up, too!" said Challas. He took a scrap of paper out of his pocket and the piece of elastic.

"Mr. Challas," said the second mate quietly, "cut that out!"

Challas gasped.

"My private opinion is you're looney! You say another word like that to me, Brearly, and I'll give you what you've been askin' for all night!"

The waitress set a glass filled with some pink liquid in front of the elderly man with the big nose and tufted eyebrows. He paid what she asked and then waved her away before she could hand him his change.

Eliza approached and stood watching him. And she, too, in spite of her gift of being able to sum up a man at a glance and place him correctly, was out of her depth clearly. Her little dark eyes were thoughtful; her sallow face crinkled into lines of suspicion. He turned in his chair and looked straight at her and she smiled uncertainly.

"Good-a ev'nin'," she said. "How-a you, hey? You come here for da firs' time, meester?"

The elderly man cleared his throat again and coughed. He half rose from his chair and dropped back again quickly.

"Your pardon, ma'm," he said, "but I wonder if you could tell me if a young man's been in here lately; a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff!"

The music had ceased and his voice, which was loud and harsh, carried to every part of the room.

Mr. Jones, of Cardiff!

There was a moment's silence and then a shout of almost delirious laughter. He had asked, this funny old guy, for a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff, a city where the Joneses were numbered by the thousand! Soberly, on lemonade or grenadine, or some such slop, a grown man had asked in Genoa for a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff, Wales!

And so the men from the tramp steamers, many of them from Cardiff themselves, rocked in their chairs and stamped their heavy feet and shouted.

At Eliza's in Genoa, Italy, a man asked for a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff!

The short, square man who had thrown the beachcomber on to his face stood up.

"Mister," he said, "perhaps you don't know, but there are two Mr. Joneses in Cardiff:. Do you mean Mr. William Jones or Mr. Albert Jones?"

Above the tumult the elderly man was heard to say:

"It's Mr. David Jones I'm looking for!"

The short, square man waved his arms above his head:

"He's lookin' for Davey Jones! Fellers, it's Davey Jones's grandfather!"

The man who had asked for Mr. David Jones rose to his feet. His pale eyes were no longer mild but fierce and hard. In his white cheeks were two spots of pink. He glanced angrily from one side of the long room to the other. The fingers of his right hand tugged at his big gray mustache.

And all of a sudden the second mate, laughing like every one else—how the —— could he help laughing?—found that he was staring at him with a kind of fixed and concentrated disgust.

"Are you laughing at me, sir?" he said in his penetrating voice.

The second mate gulped and nodded.

"Well, yes, I am!"

The elderly man advanced a couple of paces quickly and with his open palm slapped him on the side of the face. The force of the blow staggered him.

"That, sir, will teach you manners!"

"What did you do that for?"

"I'm not accustomed to being laughed at."

A strained silence had fallen on the long, stuffy room. No one spoke. The second mate felt foolish. He knew that the men were watching him, waiting for him to do something.

"Don't laugh at me!" said the elderly man. "Do you understand! If you do, I'll hit you again, harder." He dusted his hands, turned, and very slowly made his way back to his seat.

Some one sniggered. Challas brought his fist down with a crash on the table; a couple of glasses rolled on to the floor and broke.

"Brearly," he said, "are you going to sit there like a fool! Wake up! You asleep or what?"

"No, Challas, I'm not asleep!"

"Get up, then! You mean to say you'd let any one hit you and get away with it! By heaven, you're worse than I thought!"

"How can I hit a man his age?"

"You could, if you weren't afraid!" Again Challas brought his fist down hard on the table. "Brearly, the fact of the matter is you're a coward!"

The second mate stood up, rather white about the lips.

"You think because that old chap hit me and I don't hit back I'm a coward!"

Challas tilted his chair on its two back legs and sneered, his hands on the table.

"You're a coward, Brearly; we'll let it go at that!"

"We won't, Challas, not now! I've been hit, I've got to hit back! Quite right, Challas. Here goes!"

With his clenched fist he hit Challas hard on the point of his chin.

Challas and the chair went over with a crash. Challas scrambled to his feet, his face pale, a look of amazement in his narrow eyes, his mouth twisted into a snarl.

He kicked his fallen chair out of his way and advanced.

The second mate stood his ground.

As Challas rushed he hit him once more, this time on the fleshy tip of his nose. His timing was perfect. Challas rocked. Again he rushed, blood trickling down over his lips and chin. The second mate straightened his left arm and tried to prop him off, but he was too powerful. Challas broke through his guard, hit him with his left between the eyes and with his right on the chest. For an instant he was blinded. Challas hit him again, behind the left ear. He kept his wits, in spite of the pain, brought his right hard round against Challas's jaw and ducked to avoid the fierce upward swing of his left.

They clinched and went to the ground, scuffling.

The second mate tried to rise, but Challas got on top of him and straddled his waist and gripped him by the neck with both hands.

"Had enough?" he snarled. He bumped his head against the floor. "Had enough, young Brearly?"

Men were shouting:

"Get off him! Let him up!"

Some one hauled at Challas and he sprang to his feet.

They sparred, watching each other intently.

Challas, the lower part of his face smeared with blood, his eyes hard and fierce, sprang forward suddenly. He lashed out savagely with left and right. The second mate sidestepped. His foot slipped on a wet patch on a board and he dropped on one knee. Challas, off his balance, fell over him. Brearly rose, and with a heave of his shoulder threw him sidewise, as if he had been a sack of flour; as Challas slid to the floor he hit him in the body.

There was a yell of delight from the spectators.

Challas, on his feet at once, swore.

"—— rotten trick, that, Brearly!"

"Not so rotten as trying to choke a man when he's down!" said the second mate. "Why didn't you try and gouge me, you swine?"

He ran in, then, hoping to finish off the fight quickly, while he had the advantage, and was met by a right uppercut that jarred his spine and sent him reeling back against a table.

After that he waited, panting for breath, knowing that Challas was still the stronger of the two.

Again Challas rushed him. He propped him off with his straight left and gave way a pace. Challas followed him. They stood up to each other in a narrow space between the tables and slugged. Challas swung at the head and missed with both fists. The second mate drove his right into Challas's throat and Challas countered with a smash on the mark, just under the arch of the ribs.

For an instant Brearly thought he would drop. He could hardly breathe. His knees were weak. His arms felt almost too heavy to lift. He heard shouts. He heard Eliza's shrill cries of fury. He saw, curiously enough, the short, square man who had thrown the beachcomber struggling with a stout, pale barman, forcing him back toward the curtained doorway. He saw Challas grinning. He heard him say, "Got you, Brearly!" and laugh.

Somewhere he had read a story of how in a prizefight a man had pretended to be exhausted and so had trapped his opponent into thinking he was whipped. That was what he must do to Challas. Challas must be made to think he had him. He swayed on his feet and lowered his hands.

"Stop the fight!" some one shouted.

Challas ran in, still grinning broadly.

The second mate put all his strength into one last despairing left hand punch; his knuckles crunched against Challas's teeth; he saw him go down in a heap and waited, feeling limp and empty and rather sick.

Challas picked himself up from the floor very slowly.

"We've not finished yet," he said huskily.

In this he was wrong. They had finished.

"THAT'S enough!" The elderly man who had inquired after a Mr. David Jones, of Cardiff, stepped between them. "Stop it, this instant!" He glared first at one, then at the other. "The man that goes on fighting after this has got to settle with me! Hem! Do you understand?"

He stood with his arms folded across his thin chest and his legs wide apart and waited.

"Just one of you make a move and see what happens!"

Eliza caught hold of the second mate and shook him.

"You pay-a da damage! You pay-a queeck, —— you! You pay-a or I get-a da police an' you go to calaboose —— queeck!"

"Eliza," said the mate, "what are you kicking up all that noise for? Pay nothing! There's no damage done! Couple of glasses, that's all! So shut up!"

Eliza turned on the mate.

"Getta to —— outa here, all o' you!"

"I wouldn't stop here another minute if you paid me, Eliza! I've had enough!"

"Eliza," said Mr. MacPherson, "you pit me in mind of an auld hen that's tryin' to lay an egg an' disna ken hoo! Think shame on yersel', ye auld maggot!" He rose to his feet. "Come on, Mr. Stocker, let's be gang!"

Challas and Brearly scowled at each other over the head of the peacemaker.

Their faces were bruised, their lips were swollen and cut. Both bled from the nose. Their clothes were covered with dust from the floor, their collars had been torn loose from their studs and ties.

"Oot of it, the twa o' you!" said Mr. MacPherson. "No mair nonsense, ye unnerstaun'?"

"Did you see me having that scrap with the barman?" said the short, square man excitedly. "Eliza told him to go fetch the police!"

"Brearly," said Challas, "if you could fight like that, if you knew you could, why did you let me say the things I did say?"

"I don't like fighting. I hate it. I'm no good, either. I learnt something about boxing, of course, but not much."

"Glad you didn't learn any more, then!" said Challas. "You just about laid me out. I'm not sure of my feet even now."

"What I don't understand is what it was all about!"

"One man smacks you on the face, you don't do a thing to him, but you turn to and just about kill some one else!"

"There was more to it than that, Challas!"

Challas shrugged his shoulders and grinned wryly.

"I thought you were different, that's all!" He dabbed at his nose with a soiled handkerchief. "It wasn't altogether my fault, either! You see, Brearly, you rather have given one the impression you thought all engineers the scum of the earth, haven't you?"

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"You were heard telling the fourth engineer of the *Valona* there was no good in the engine-room and there never would be! You said, too, you'd rather be an ordinary seaman on deck than a chief engineer down below! Now, without prejudice, Mister, and letting bygones be bygones, was that playing the game? Why go out of your way to make things harder for us engineers than they are already!"

"Another —— scrap between bridge and engine-room!" said the short, square man. "I thought it was something serious."

The second mate, conscious of a circle of grinning faces, began to laugh.

What fools they'd made of themselves, the pair of them!

"The fourth engineer of the *Valona* was a cousin of mine," he said. "I told him one night in B. A. there was no good in the engine-room, but I didn't mean what you think I meant. I was talking about myself, Mr. Challas! I couldn't get any good out of the engine-room, personally! Why, you chump, my old man was a chief engineer before you were born! I've two brothers older than me who are engineers now: one a chief, the other a second! I thought every one knew that. I was to have been an engineer, too, but I couldn't stick it in the shops. The work was too hard for one thing, I'd not got a mechanical mind for another. I wanted the fresh air."

They stared at each other for a moment very seriously and then they began to laugh self-consciously, awkwardly.

"Well," said Challas, "I made a —— fool of myself, didn't I! Sorry, Mister! I didn't know."

They gripped each other's hands.

The second mate felt happier than he had felt for years. A weight seemed to have been lifted from his mind. He was glad that Challas hadn't disliked him for any personal failing or fault but only because he thought he had insulted his craft.

"An' noo, let's be gang, fur heaven's sake!" said Mr. MacPherson. "Eliza's still got her ears back!"

The second mate turned and saw the lean old man with the big nose and the mustache and the pale eyes watching him curiously. He went to him and said, rather breathlessly, knowing that the crowd still listened—

"I want to apologize."

"What for?"

"For laughing."

"That's all right, but you oughtn't to have laughed. That's why I hit you. I'm a man who won't stand any nonsense. Never would. Never will." He frowned and plucked at his skinny throat with finger and thumb. "Lord knows what set you off, the pair of you, but you put up as good a fight as I've seen! I don't hold with violence, as a general rule: I hit you—hem! —because I had to, for your good, not mine! And now, if you've learned your lesson, young man, I can say I hope that I—hem! —didn't hurt you! I'm inclined sometimes to underestimate — hem! — my own strength."

The second mate grinned.

"Why did you want to know if a Mr. Jones, of Cardiff, had been here lately?"

"Can't a father inquire after his own son?"

"Why, yes," said the second mate. "Why, of course."

And so this was the father of David Jones, of Cardiff!

The old man drew himself up to his full height.

"My son shipped before the mast, against my express wishes," he said. "I told him he wasn't to, but he wouldn't listen. I didn't like the way he spoke to me. I'm a man who won't stand any nonsense—hem! —not from any one!" And then he seemed from his manner to be suddenly doubtful. He glanced uneasily about him at the crowded tables and the men listening. "I had to put my foot down—hem!—hadn't I?"

"Why," said the second mate, "I suppose you had."

"A foolish, headstrong lad: he would have his own way, whatever happened! He ran away. Maybe I ought to have been more considerate, kinder, more patient." He broke off and stared with vacant eyes across the room toward the silent piano and the old man who had been playing and the girl who had sung. "He was seen here, having a drink with a shipmate. It was here—this very bar, I'm positive. Hem! Yes, it was here! And so, gentlemen, so I've been making a few—a few inquiries."

"I don't want to disappoint you, sir," said the second mate, "but it's going to be hard to find him. In a place like this, you see, fellows come and go. Nobody knows their names, if they don't happen to say. Where was his ship bound to after leaving Genoa?"

"Ah!" said the old man, "that's the trouble!" He looked worried and distressed. All his old assurance had gone. He twisted his hat in his hands and muttered to himself.

"Hadn't you better be going, sir?" said the mate. "I don't think, if I were you, I'd stay here any longer."

THE dark-red plush curtain that screened the long room from the bar was lifted and a girl stood staring at the crowd of men seated at the little round marble-topped tables or standing, listening with half-concealed smiles to what the second mate of the *Sparhawk* and the father of David Jones, of Cardiff, said to each other.

Probably no girl quite like this girl had ever before trodden the sad floor boards of Eliza's bar in all its long and checkered history. Unlike the dark-haired, fleshy, greasy girls who served the drinks and sang and played guitars, she was fair and slender, tall for a girl and very pretty in a quiet way. Her face was pale: there was no color in her cheeks against which there showed locks of bobbed red-gold hair; her features were thin and regular and delicately modeled; her eyes were dark blue and filled with a curious expectancy of disaster or—so it seemed—of horror; her firm pink lips were pressed tight together.

She wore a lilac frock, under a coat of black satin which was flared on either side, a small, close-fitting hat of lilac straw, pale flesh-colored silk stockings and black satin pumps with high heels and silver buckles.

She let the curtain fall and walked straight across the room toward the elderly man with the large nose and the mustache and the fierce eyebrows.

"Father!" she said, and took hold of his arm.

He wheeled quickly and looked at her blankly.

"Eleanor!" he said. "Why, Eleanor, girl!" His voice became suddenly tense. "Any news, Eleanor?"

"Yes, father," she said. "Good news! David's on his way home now from Australia."

"Thank God!" he said. "Thank God for that! We must go home at once." He broke into wheezy chuckles of laughter. "At once! David on his way home from Australia! The dear lad!"

"Come, then!" said the girl. She tried to draw him to the door.

"My dear," he said, "I must thank these gentlemen for all their kindness."

The girl's cheeks were flushed. She seemed confused and frightened.

"We must make haste," she said.

The second mate, aware of his bruised face and swollen lips, seen in the tall mirror opposite where he stood, tried to sidle away, but the girl's father stopped him.

"Young man, you've been most kind to me! I'd like you to come and see us when next you're in Cardiff! We'll be delighted to show you what small hospitality we may: myself, my son, my daughter! Your friends, too, would be welcome, any of them! Hem! My evening, gentlemen, spent in your—hem!—company, your society, will remain a precious — hem! — memory! I thank you." Then he rubbed his hands together and laughed once more. "Now I must go. We've had news of my son, David. He's on his way home from Australia. I intend—hem! — to leave Genoa to-night. Eleanor, you're quite right, we've got to make haste."

The girl hesitated. She smiled nervously and spoke to the second mate under her breath.

"I'd like to explain. Not here, though."

"We're going, anyway," said the second mate. "Ready, you chaps?"

In the long bar the girl whispered to her father and patted his shoulder. He shook his head, almost angrily, it seemed; his voice carried to where the two mates and the two engineers were standing.

"We can't wait, Eleanor. We've not got a second to spare. We must leave tonight."

"There's no train," she said. "Not till morning."

"Another delay," he said. "I tell you, Eleanor, it's driving me mad! Do you hear, girl? Driving me mad! David's on his way home and you don't seem to care."

He moved slowly in the direction of the street door; the girl turned and came toward the men who stood, watching her.

There was no one within hearing. Two men sat at a small table near the red plush curtain and talked in undertones. Another man, apparently the worse for drink, slouched back in a chair and snored. The stout, pale barman polished glasses and stared with goggling eyes across the zinc topped counter.

"My father came here to find my eldest brother," said the girl. "He ran away to sea and didn't come home again." She glanced hastily over her shoulder. Her father had passed out through the swing door into the street. "It's not true what I said about his being on his way home from Australia, of course! But you see how it is, don't you? Every once in a while my father comes to Genoa to look for my brother. He was seen by a man who knew us in Cardiff in one of the waterfront cafés, having a drink. That was the last that we heard of him. My poor father thinks if only he can meet someone who saw him here and spoke to him he'll be able to trace him. As soon as he reaches Genoa one of us, either my sister or myself, whoever has come with him, tells him we've had news of David, he's on his way home from Australia. He doesn't ask any questions, he returns to Cardiff at once. Usually, of course, he doesn't get as far as the waterfront; there's a wire waiting for us at our hotel; but tonight he gave me the slip. That's why I had to come after him." She smiled shyly. "That's all! I thought I should tell you in case you wondered."

"But when ye git him to Cardiff," said Mr. MacPherson, "isna he disapp'intit? What daes he say when he kens that it isna true his son's on his way hame?"

"He never does know," said the girl. "He goes back to Cardiff and waits for a message to say definitely which day my brother will reach home. That part lasts two or three days or so. And then he forgets. It's the truth. He doesn't remember he's ever been to Genoa. The whole thing fades from his mind. And after that he'll be quite all right again, for six months, or a year, even! That's all."

"Is there nothing we can do to help?" said the mate.

"Nothing," said the girl. "Thank you, all the same. We'll leave Genoa for Milan and Paris and London first thing in the morning."

"What was the name of your brother's ship?" asked the second mate.

"The *Kabenda*," said the girl.

She smiled shyly, then, with a little nod of her head to each of the four men, she turned and hurried away.

They stood at the door and watched her as she walked by her father's side, along the Via Milano.

"That's a queer kind of story," said Challas.

"—— queer," said the mate dryly. "The *Kabenda* sank with all hands, February, twelve years ago, off Hatteras: seen and spoken in a nor' east gale and that was the last of her! All hands! Now, I wonder —I wonder—"

He broke off and whistled softly to himself.

"Jones, of Cardiff, eh," said Mr. MacPherson. "Queer how names stick! I met a man yince in Genoa here, or else it was Naples, an' he told me he'd been aboard the *Kabenda* her last v'yage. He'd left her at Pensacola, Florida. Jones his name was an' he came frae Cardiff."

"But, ——!" said the second mate. "Suppose it's the same man! Mr. MacPherson, one of us ought to go after her and tell her!"

"Bide a wee, laddie, an' dinna fash yersel'! Ye mind thon drunken, disreputable beachcomber that was in the room back thonder the nicht? Weel, what wud the lassie say if thon degenerate was her brither?"

"That," said the second mate sharply. "What do you mean? That wasn't her brother, Mr. MacPherson! He couldn't have been! That man was a cockney!"

"Aye, mebbe he was. But the man, Jones, I'm talking aboot, was on the beach the same as he was! Aye, there wasna a penn'orth o' diff'rence between 'em! I gi'ed him a shillin' oot the kindness o' ma heart because I peetied him an' he threw it in ma face because I wudna mak' it a poond! In the end I knockit him doon. I had to! An' he tried to knife me."

They made their way slowly back to the ship.

Nobody had anything very much to say. The night was still hot. Overhead the stars blazed in the clear summer sky. The lights of the city, sprawling over the hillsides, were reflected in the calm waters of the harbor.

The second mate was sad. He did not know why. He ought to have been happy, but he wasn't happy.

He felt lonely and rather forlorn.

A queer evening, he thought. Since he had come ashore he had endured much. He had been bullied and insulted and sworn at, all for no reason. His motives had been questioned. He had been forced to fight a man stronger than himself to prove he was not a coward. He had made friends with the man he had fought. He had heard the beginning of the strangest story he had ever heard.

And now he wondered whether he would ever hear the end.

He sighed.

"What's the matter, Mr. Brearly?" said the mate. "Why the sigh?"

"All being well, we ought to be back in Cardiff about the end of October."

The second engineer laughed.

"Aye, we ocht!"

LITTLE WHITE SAVAGE

by William Ashley Anderson

MOUNT MERU is a gracious sister of stately Kilimanjaro, whose glacial crest floats like a pinkish cloud high above the mist of heat that rises from the Massai Steppe and completely obliterates the lower green-clad buttresses of the African overlord.

Mount Meru is not so high, and its thin crest is only occasionally silvered with snow; but it is great enough, and far more imposing than its neighbor to the south, Oldeani, that magnificent burst bubble whose vast meadowed crater is a refuge for uncounted game. I marched about the wilderness surrounding Oldeani long before it attained its present fame. In fact I participated in the capture of a German column on its primeval slopes, the German food supply having been reduced to the hind leg of a rhino.

I took a small patrol over the shoulder of Mount Meru once, attempting a little exploration. For three days and nights we floundered through dark, eery forest, whose dripping silence was broken only by the sharp metallic ring of the hornbill's note and the furtive rustle of silky black colobus monkeys far overhead. The great height of the forest trees dwarfed us. There were three growths; the underbrush, which was of sizable trees; the middle growth of large trees; and the primeval monsters whose boles passed through the two lower ceilings of foliage and whose branches were lost to our view beyond. In this forest elephant gins seemed no larger than rabbit traps. Small sloping ravines opened out like the pleats of an accordion as we tramped for hours from ridge to ridge.

On the fourth day I had had enough. Provisions had run out, and I had sent back all my men except my orderly, Sudi, a silent and dependable soldier. We began working our way downward and out of the forest.

Late in the afternoon we heard the peculiar whistle of Massai boys tending cattle, and soon we came out on a bare ridge that gave us a clear view down into an open valley which led upon the bare rolling hills flowing away in heat waves to Oldeani.

There were the cattle milling in the center of the dusky valley, and the boys were yelling and whistling from slope to slope as they rounded up the stragglers. I called out:

"Hodi Raffiki hopa!"

Instead of this call reassuring the herders, the boys looked up with startled faces. They shouted excitedly to one another. Then they began to race in silence down the slopes, vanishing in the shadows like wild animals. For a few moments we had a clear view of them. One of the boys was white!

There was no chance of an illusion. The boys were all stark naked, except for a piece of hide on their shoulders, a gourd and a long stick. Our first view of them was at no more than a hundred yards distance.

The little white boy was a complete savage. He was probably about ten years old with tow hair, and red sun-toughened skin. It was impossible to tell the color of his eyes. But he was white!

Nevertheless, he gave a yell with the rest of them, and scurried down that slope just as precipitately as the others, his skinny little legs twinkling as he raced to shelter, his light cattle spear waving over his head to balance his headlong flight. In a few seconds he had vanished.

I looked at Sudi, dazed.

"Yes," gasped Sudi, "he was white!"

"But what sort of an affair is this?" I said. "How is it possible?"

"Perhaps he is a Germanee—or the son of a Dutchman—"

It seemed the only explanation; yet it was no explanation at all. The boy was a Massai in his instincts and movements. None but a child who had been nurtured as a Massai could live on those plains naked as a Massai. The diet of the Massai is clotted blood and curdled milk. No white child could be successfully weaned to that diet. Besides he had not recognized my call in Kisswahili, which any native who had had contact with whites would have known instantly.

Black African night was on us before we reached the bottom of the valley, and we had to halt and make a fire. In the morning all signs of the Massai and their cattle had vanished. Nevertheless I made a determined search out across the plain, though the hope of locating Massai in flight is close to the absurd.

About three o'clock in the afternoon I topped a rise, and blundered upon a *manyeta,* silent, empty-looking. But I was certain that behind the *zareba* of thorn bush packed into a firm wall seven feet high there was probably life in the huts.

The status of the Massai at this time was peculiar. Both the British and Germans had tacitly agreed to keep hands off this race of fierce and ruthless warriors. It was understood, without the necessity of discussion, that an irruption of these people would add unspeakable horror to the campaign along the equator. They were therefore approached by both sides with delicacy and tact, and courteously persuaded simply to remain neutral. Any act, therefore, calculated to arouse their hostility would take on serious consequences of great magnitude.

I approached the *manyeta,* again calling out:

"Hodi! We are friends here!"

At about ten paces from the entrance, suddenly I heard a fluttering sound, and jerked my head up as a flight of spears dived past me.

Sudi was standing just out of range of the spears, with his rifle ready to throw up and fire. With the hair riffling on my scalp I backed slowly away until I stood side by side with him. There was nothing to be done. If those spears had struck, no one in God's world would ever have known what had become us. We would simply have been snuffed out. On the other hand if I accepted this as a challenge and attempted a two-handed fight against that *manyeta* the chances are Sudi and I would not have come out alive anyway, or we might have precipitated another war.

We turned in our tracks and began a long grueling march across country to a point where we could hit a trail leading to an outpost. Within two weeks we were hundreds of miles away.

F. R. Buckley

whose stories of Old Italy you all know

in a

Modern Serial in a Medieval Setting

The WAY of

I, HUMBLE Brother Simeon, to whose hand the feel of the sword is far more familiar than that of the learned pen, as a penance for two unseemly acts ill-befitting one of my holy station, hereby, in accordance with the decree of the good abbot, set down the whole story of my warrior days, the better to feel meet disgust thereat, especially since in contemplation of that impious period, I shall realize to the full how fortunate was my saving, and how sweet the life of peace. In first, I sinned mightily by throwing soup at Brother Ambrose for talking ignorantly about artillery. In second, my offense was that of doing violence with sword and fists to a young noble whom I found half-drunk at an inn, and otherwise disporting himself most shamefully. Him I cautioned in a fatherly way, but the young blood preferred to take offense, jeering at my monkish garb, and calling me "old woman." Then he had the temerity to bare his sword at me, and (*mea culpa!*) I grew hot-headed as of yore. Ah well, perhaps the youth has learned a lesson that may well serve him in the future. . . .

In my eighteenth year I was apprenticed by my father, a poor musician, to one Messer Porsini, a mercer of good standing in Rometia. Here, my father hoped, I should apply myself faithfully to my task, learn the business, perhaps even marry the squint-eyed daughter of my employer, and in time own a little shop of my own. Below my window I often heard of nights the watch-calls and the clanging of the armor of the guard of the Duke of Rometia, and I felt an irresistible longing to take down my sword from its hook (I had brought it with me from home) and stroll by myself in the dark streets.

One night, when the duke was holding a fiesta in honor of a visiting count, I yielded to the temptation, entered the palace grounds, was inveigled by several of the soldiers to partake of the flowing wine-cups. In this condition I saw two armored men dragging a crying girl. One of the men called:

"Hence, boy, this is no affair of thine."

However, being hot with wine, I whipped out my sword, pierced one man at the center of his breastplate and then had at the other till I ran him through likewise. Thereupon I ran home and fell trembling and panting on my bed. Soon I heard a hammering on the door, and the sleeping household was aroused by the deep bellow of:

"Open! In the name of the duke, open!"

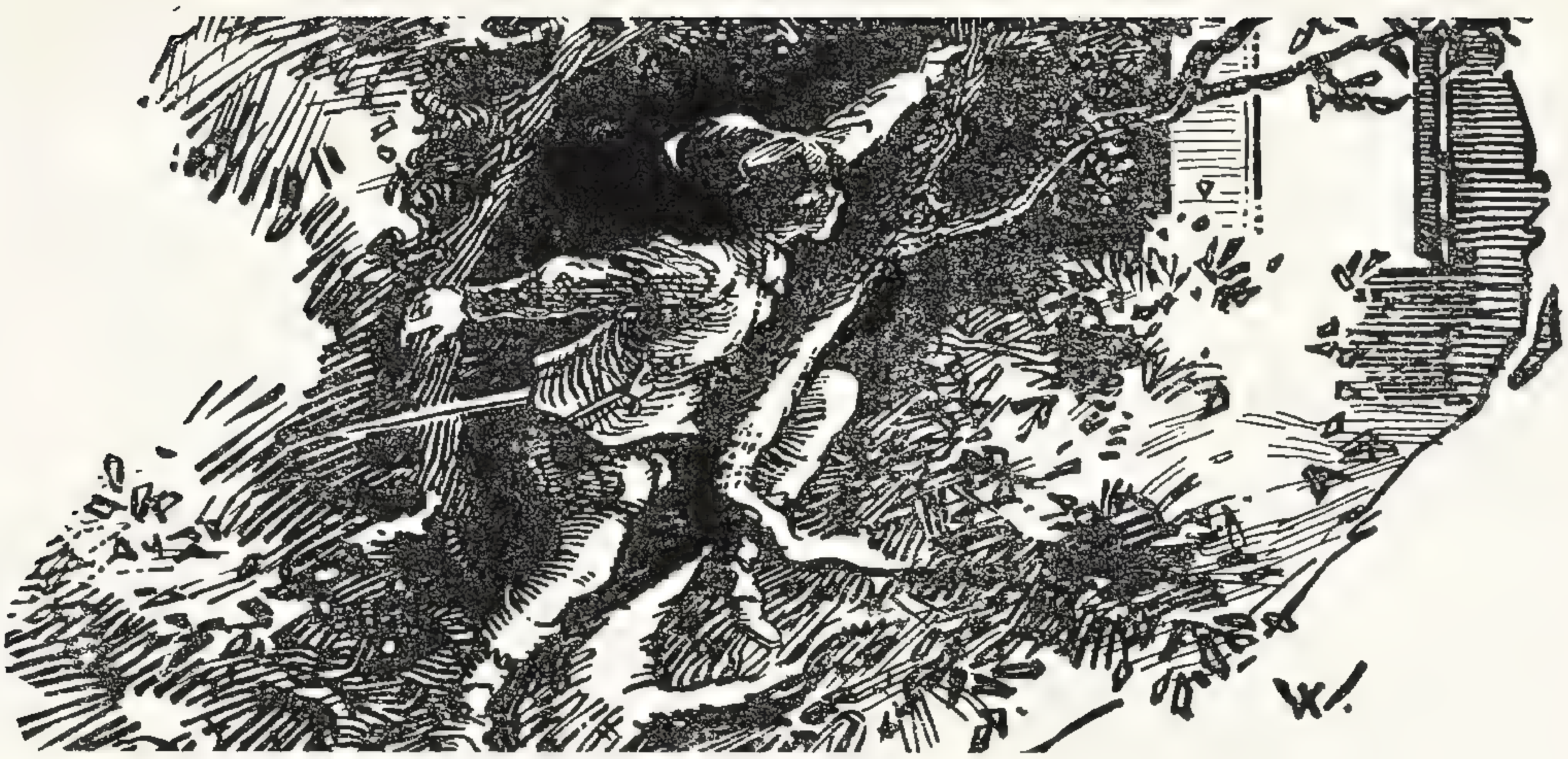
Old Porsini began to quake and ran about frantically, looking for a hiding-place, for he was secretly conspiring against the person of the duke, and he thought he had been discovered and sent for. But they were after Porsini's apprentice, myself, and I was marched off between a file of the duke's guard, headed by a pinkish-bearded sergeant, my hands still stained with the blood of my escapade.

When I was brought into the presence of the duke, I found him in converse with his sister, the Countess Anita. He was imperiously telling her that his wish that she marry a certain count was final, and though she appeared highly spirited, she left the room apparently subdued to his will. The duke then turned to me.

"Why didst thou kill the Count of Monterosso?"

The Count of Monterosso! I stood paralyzed. I had thought both my victims common soldiers. I explained to the duke as best I could, and when I mentioned the girl, the duke became incensed.

Thereupon the duke called his chaplain, sent one of his men to find the girl, and when the two were before him, he ordered the chaplain to marry the girl to me, then and there, in order, as he said, to gain two marks with one shot: The count whom he wanted out of the way for personal reasons was dead; and the duke could make a great play of virtue with the townspeople. Since I was loath at the time to accept a place in his guard, the duke gave me a bag of gold (which I in turn gave to the girl), and sneering at my preference for the mercery, dismissed me, saying the place would be open if I should make a choice anew. He gave me, too, a pardon for old



SINNERS

Porsini, whom in truth he had found out, on condition that the mercer take me back and treat me fairly.

But Porsini turned me from his door before I had opportunity to reveal to him the paper I carried. Thereupon, seeing me thus turned out, Ercole, another apprentice, stole forth and presented me with a little money he had saved up, for (simple-hearted wretch!) he was under the impression I aspired to the hand of the mercer's daughter, and now, at my departure, I should leave him free to press his own suit. I took the money, giving him in return the duke's paper, to hold over the head of old Porsini as a club, thus insuring better treatment at his hands.

With the money I went on a three-days' drinking bout, ending up in a street-gutter, where Stella, the girl I had married so suddenly at the duke's behest, found me and brought me to her home.

CHAPTER VI

OF MY WIFE'S FAMILY

DOTH any one between nonage and dotage, even in the unknown century to which I write, fail to see the end inevitable from such beginnings?

I trow not; but let it be remembered that nonage was my case at that time; so that when I awoke in the morning with a head that still rang from the bleeding and the reliques of the wine, the most serious preoccupation of my soul was how to escape the noise of the hammers on the anvils down below; which, *cling-cling-cling, calang-cling-calang-calang,* seemed to pierce my very brains.

I arose—sitting heavily again on the edge of the bed from a faintness that overcame me—dressed, and went downstairs into the house. The sun was high; the hour must have been seven at the least; and of a surety breakfast was done with long ago—so I thought as I passed the last turning of the stairway and came in sight of the kitchen. Never shall I forget (I feel it now) the warm rush of delight with which I beheld the girl Stella, neatly dressed, her hair shining in the sunlight of the room, bustling to lay food on a napkin—a steaming soup, with fresh crusts to go therein; bread, cheese and a mug of wine. Hearing my footsteps on the stair, she peered up out of the light into the darkness, and smiled.

"Oh, mother!" she called, "here is our guest!"

Upon which out hastened from an inner room a pleasant women somewhat like Stella's self, but thinner, and of less stature, and with lines on her face which would have proclaimed, had I known aught of such proclamations at that time, that the smile with which she greeted me was not habitual to her.

She had a pewter plate in one hand and a clout in the other; and threw both about my neck when she kissed me, as was then the fashion of hostesses.

"Good day," says Stella's mother, "we heard the boards of the floor creak—Olivieri was half-way up the stairs to call thee for breakfast at four o'clock, when I called him back and said, 'Nay, that is foolish. Sleep is the thing for him'—'Aye,' says he, 'but the lad must eat'—'And why not,' says I, 'Sure a bowl of soup will take no harm from simmering till he wakes of himself.' So when we heard thee stir, Stella whipped it off the chimney back like the good girl she is, and now fall to for the love of God; it will put strength into thee I'll warrant—where's a spoon, Stella?—it's not often she forgets the like of that; this morning 'tis the excitement of thy being here and small wonder, poor lamb, God wot strange things happen in the world. Well, eating's better than talk when the mind's full and the stomach empty. Fall to; I'll not stand here chattering. Stella can stay with thee while I finish the dishes. I hope the morning finds thee better, Francesco—Messer Francesco would be more polite, sure, but my tongue slips, with Francesco the only name our poor girl knew after that awful night, and so it's as Francesco we've talked of thee, little thinking ever to see thee again, but it hath pleased Heaven to send thee almost sitting on our doorstep, so what's to do; one would think 'twas intended; and thou sick to boot."

"I was drunk," says I, shamefaced, not caring to impose on these good-hearted folk.

"And small wonder!" says the mother indignantly. "After such doings! Credit to thee not to have done worse, I say! Well, I must back to my pots."

She went, too; leaving me in an excellent warm glow of self-pity and almost of approbation; to which the good soup quickly added an internal warmth almost as pleasant. There were slices of carrot in it, which reminded me of the carrots Stella had been carrying in her basket yestere'en; I looked up at her and found that she was regarding me with her great dark eyes; upon being caught at the which she blushed.

"Take wine," says she, pushing the mug toward me; but after my excesses of the past two days, the smell of the stuff still sickened me—I think that was when I gained my hate for sour chianti.

"That is well," Stella told me gravely; then, as I put my hand to my forehead. "The fumes of the other still remain?"

" 'Tis the noise," says I.

"The noise? What noise?"

The room, being on the same level with the forge, was ringing like a belfry; *cling-cling-calang-slither* (as they turned the blades over) *calang-calang-calang.*

"The anvils," says I; upon which she listened, seemed to hear it with difficulty and laughed.

"I am so used to it that my ears notice it not any more," says she (there was a dimple on each cheek just by the corners of her mouth). "Mother, the young man saith the forge deeves him."

"Call him Francesco, and stand not so on ceremony," says her elder, putting pewter busily on the sideboard. "Well, he hath finished his soup, and it's time for thee to be off to market; and doubtless he is in haste to be gone about his business."

Thinking her offended, I rose—and sat down again from the faintness aforesaid; I had been bled two basinsful the night before. Stella gave a cry.

"Alas, madame," I mumbled, scarcely knowing what I said, "I have no business."

"It was ungenerous of thee to say begone, mother," says the girl, holding up the wine-cup again, which I pushed away.

"Who said begone? God knows, and thou still better, it's not my habit— If the poor lad hath no business, likely he hath no home either, all thanks to that accursed duke, I wager—is it so, Francesco?"

"Alas, yes."

"Then, to show thee we're not paynim Turks that eat their poor folk like wolven, this is thy home till thou hast a better. Stella, call thy father from the forge; he shall give the young man a suit of his clothes until such time— Nay, protest not nor thank me, young man; it is aye more pleasant to help the unfortunate than to be unfortunate and receive help; not to say that in a manner of speech thou'rt of the family already—tee-hee!—Antonio, this is—"

A tall man, but stooped, with gray hair and mustachio, and eyes that surveyed me over spectacles, had entered, carrying a hammer still in his hand, and bringing with him a smell of burnt leather apron. He had a stick of wood in one corner of his mouth, which he perpetually chewed to keep his mouth wet (I learned after) before the heat of the fire; and as he chewed, he spat forth splinters from the corner opposite.

"Aye," says he, before his wife could get into full spate of oratory, " 'tis Francesco, without a doubt; fifteen times have I heard it already. Good morrow, young sir. And he needeth a suit of clothes. Well?"

"Well? Can he have one of thine?"

Olivieri smiled; a slow and humorous smile which I met and returned; there was a liking between us on the spot; he spat splinters.

"Certes, if thou say'st so, Maria. I know not one—"

"Well, which shall he have?"

"—from another. Give him which thou choose. Now, 'tis a busy—"

"Choose, man! Show sense for once! They're thy clothes."

Olivieri thought for some time, weighing his hammer and looking over his spectacles.

"The black velvet?" says he at last.

"Chut! Well thou knowest 'tis all shabby with the wearing of thy master-armorer's chain. (She looked sidewise at me, for I was to note his importance.) "There's naught but the russet fit to wear."

"Then give him the russet," says Olivieri mildly, while Stella, returning, stood in the doorway and smiled at me. "Now I must back to work. Your servant, young man."

"A pretty thing to say to your son-in-law!" cries his wife with a squeal of laughter, and clapping her hands together at the jest.

Old Olivieri, however, did not smile—though Stella, who resembled him more than she did her mother, meseemed, did laugh and blush; nay, the father looked at me friendly-wise, yet as it were sadly; said "Ha!" nodded, and was gone.

"He's aye like that when he is occupied," explained Stella's mother. "Now, I'll lay out the clothing, and while Stella maketh ready—"

We were dressed within a minute of one another (thanks to a great difficulty I had with the old man's style of point-lacing) and in due course we set forth for the market, holden in those days four times a week, and just off the great square. I forget the name of the street; it was broad, with lindens in it. Nay, plane-trees they were; I recall their spotted bark, likewise the spotted shadow they flung on the road and on the bright colors of the peasants' dresses—Stella and I, by chance, were both in russet, cut from the same piece of cloth. And the venders who knew her not, especially the old women, took us for bride and groom—which indeed we were!—and laughed and gave Stella more for her money than was due. One old crone wished us fourteen sons and never a daughter—

Ah, me! Alack!

Hastening from her, we went to the booth where salt fish was sold; in confusion (she was blushing again) Stella dropped her purse, and the money rolled north, south, east and west; we stooped to pick it up together; bumped our heads and laughed. When I rose, my faintness overcame me again. I staggered up against a plane-tree, and with the pulsing of the blood as it returned to my head, meseems the surgeon's wound in my arm must have reopened; at least, of a sudden I felt the bandage give, and lo! there was blood running down my hand.

"Francesco!" cries Stella, in fear.

"Tis nothing!" says I.

Upon which, there pushed up to us a strange, a most unpleasant-faced old man, and put his arm about me.

" 'Tis not much, but sit down, my son," says he harshly. "I will arrange this bandage, and all will be well. Press thy thumbs a finger's breadth above the wound, Madonna. So. H'm. A neat wound, and well gained. I put the bloody part outside, thou seest, that the clean may be next the orifice. They did not tell me that rogue wounded thee; however, he was well paid for't."

"What rogue?" says I.

"That accursed count," says the old man, tying the band skilfully and tucking in the ends. "Thou'rt Francesco Vitali—aye? And this thy bride; she hath got a fine husband, and thou a good girl; there are few like either of thee in these bad days, and glad am I to see the duke honoring virtue, and letting vice meet its reward. Matteo Viaggiatore is my name, young man, a tailor and no friend to home-robbing; and it is of thy master I'll buy my cloth henceforth, telling him 'tis on thy account I do it."

By this time there was a great crowd about us, all staring at me; and at the old man's words—he was a notable Puritan, and a great leader of such as had no profit to make from the duke's politics—the whole body of folk seemed to burst out murmuring:

"And I—and I—and I—"

"But now he hath no master," says Stella.

Matteo Viaggiatore, rising and helping me to my feet, nodded and cracked the granite of his face into a smile.

"Aye, catch the breath of fame," says he, approvingly. "Hast started thine own business of mercery, eh, lad? And famously thou'lt do."

A similar old man behind him broke forth—

"Most lads and their girls would ha' squandered the duke's wedding present on clothes and a feast."

"Aye!" growled the crowd sympathetically, appraising our vestments.

I was so taken aback that all these folk knew our story, even down to the bag of gold the duke had given Stella in the privacy of his cabinet, that I stood and gaped at them without saying a word; which they all took for modesty. As for the girl, I have since learned that no woman doth ever deny anything to her credit; no matter how little, nor how untrue. Doubtless this is why, in all ages, they have been called men's superiors in respect of those qualities which are matters of hearsay.

"Well," says the old tailor, taking his packet of fish (for like most Puritans, he thought all other folks impure, especially servants a-shopping), "when thou'rt ready for orders, young man, come see me. I need fifty ells of red velvet for uniforms at this minute, and I'll not buy it till thou'st come. Good-by, then."

"But, sir—" I began.

"Tut-tut!" says the old man over his shoulder. "What I say I mean. No need for thanks."

Stella tugged at my unhurt arm.

"Come away," says she; but that was easier said than done; full an hour passed by ere we could force our way from amidst my admirers and the commentators (they appear even at weddings of dwarfs with giantesses) on how well-matched we were. Every man, woman and child in the city, meseemed, had more of the story at fingertips than I had ever heard—especially more concerning the duke's fatherly love for the home-keeping folk (from whom he recruited his armies) and his lion-like protection of them against all aggressors, including nobles (but excepting himself).

Two dozen folk must have told us their names, and where they were to be found, and promised to buy cloth of us as soon as we should have used the wedding-present to set up our shop; which names I forgot as fast as I heard them, though in Stella's mind they stuck fast as gold-pieces to a glued stick.

"But, Madonna Stella—" says I, as, freed, we hurried homeward.

"Aye," says she, with her eyes shining, "but hasten—it is near noon, and dinner yet to be cooked. Father can not a-bear to be kept waiting. Is't not wonderful—a great trade all ready for thee?"

"But I have no shop—no stock—"

I would have added that I had no desire to be a mercer; but she cut me short.

"There is the duke's gold, man!" she cried, face sparkling with delight. " 'Tis not so much as they think, but 'twill rent a fine shop, and buy cloth enow to start. And—"

"But that is thine," says I.

"Pish," says Stella, reddening. "What's mine is thine; besides—"

Here she reddened still more, and hurried me forward faster—

What happened then?

Aye, we ate our noon-meat; but by what route, I mean, did events march from that market-place to the—the bivouac of a week thence?

Meseemed I had the description of it all clear in my mind whenas I began to write the chapter foregoing; since then, however, I have been a week absent from the manuscript, while Brother Sebastian, our infirmiary, hath rubbed my right palm with aromatic oils to ease the cramp. The abbot, having been a notable penman in his day, and coming upon us thus engaged, did smile. . .

Well—

First, at dinner; I remember the delight of Stella, cooking it, and telling her mother what had befallen; I remember her mother's joy at the recital; which joy, after some minutes seemed strangely to subside, so that by the time the meat was on the table, and old Antonio came in from the forge still chewing his stick, the good woman appeared to have fallen into some trouble of mind.

What time Stella repeated the story and clapped her hands again over her solution to the problem of my shop (and old Antonio ate), she sat silent, looking from Stella to me, and then, expectantly, at the top of her husband's head.

"Well?" she demanded of him, when Stella was done.

He looked up, as though surprized.

"Well?" says he. "Well, that's good."

"But what dost thou think of the plan?" his wife insisted.

He had recommenced to eat; now he raised his head again and surveyed Maria for a longer time.

"It is no business of mine," says he at last; glanced at me; took another mouthful, and appeared to dismiss the question; yet I noticed that while Stella's mother, having shrugged her shoulders impatiently at Antonio's stupidity, talked of the project with Stella, the old man from time to time glanced at me again. Twice or thrice, I thought he was about to put the matter of his glance into words; but each time he stopped the vocal opening with a mouthful; having munched the last of which, he got up, brushed away crumbs, reached for his apron, said, "Thank God!" and returned to his smithy.

"Much counsel from him," says Maria Olivieri.

"But—" says Stella.

"Clear away these things as soon as may be," says her mother, rising and bustling the empty dishes away, "and then put on thy cloak; we will go with thine Aunt Sara; this is no matter to leap into without advice, and if one will not counsel us, another must. Francesco, meantime, can seek if there is a shop to be had—if we decide the plan is feasible."

"But shall he not come with us, Mother? Sure, 'twill be his business."

"Sure 'tis *thy* money," retorts Maria Olivieri (meseemed a trifle sharply), "and sure 'tis thy family should decide how it shall be done with."

Mother and daughter looked at one another; and after a moment, the girl's resistance melted.

"He can not walk much about the town," she said, looking at me pityingly. "He is still weak, Mother."

"Then let him stay here. Put the broken meats in the crock, and get thy hood, or thine aunt may be gone out. He can lie here, or go talk with thy father in the forge, as he chooses."

So, during the long afternoon, I stood by Olivieri (with his good-will, but at first without much conversation) while he wrapped new sword-hilts with wire, which was the last stage in finishing them to be delivered; he had a dozen or more before him, shining blue and gallant on the grimy bench; they made my fingers itch, and at last I asked him might I handle one a little.

As I swung it, he surveyed me over his spectacles; he peered rather into my face; then slowly smiled and shook his head.

"That's more thy taste than scissors, is't not?" says he.

A chill ran through my heart, and I laid the sword down. The feel of the pommel on my wrist, and the chill of the bell to my fingers; the hiss, moreover, of the blade through the air, had made my blood surge; but now I remembered my father.

"Aye; but—"

He continued to regard me, as it were sadly.

"Where are Stella and her mother?" he asked.

I told him.

"Ah!" says he; and returned to the wrapping of the next hilt. "Ah, well— In this life, young man, few of us can do as we would; the fate of most is to do what we can; and perhaps 'tis for the best. That is to be remembered."

He looked at me again, but saw I was not convinced. He took off his spectacles, and turned in his seat to face me.

"For instance," he went on, rubbing his eyes, 'it is evident that we can not foresee our ends; our plans, the plans of youth, I mean, must needs be made in ignorance. I was agog to be an alchemist."

"An alchemist?" says I.

"Even so; but I was frustrated; my father died, my elder brother was a scamp, my mother was ill; it was, as thou seest, an armorer that I became, and for long I used to rebel in my mind, visioning the glories of which blind circumstance had robbed me. I was married and established here before I found comfort, as follows: in thinking that since I knew not the outcome of my life, perchance God did, and that the circumstances which had prevented my coming to my ambition were not blind, but most far-sighted barriers on a dangerous path. In this forge, I am not the confidant of kings and the source of their riches, as in my expectations I saw myself; but neither am I burned at the stake for sorcery, as perhaps the clearer-sighted eyes of the Lord beheld me."

I saw not the upshot of this harangue,

but it made me strangely uneasy, like the visit of a priest to a prisoner who doth not know he is to be hanged.

"I would rather have the planning of my own life, and take the consequences," says I.

Antonio shrugged, and returned to his work.

"Ah, so would all youths," he muttered, "but—since they can not, there are compensations. Try the blade on that block of lead. My apprentice is gone, as thou seest. The circumstance of argumentativeness hath lost him this place; but who knows, he may become a bishop."

The Aunt Sara returned to supper; a pale woman, a virgin of fifty, with a large head fronted by a great flat face, across the which extended a wide and narrow mouth somewhat sedged on the upper lip with brown-gray hairs; for the rest, she knitted perpetually, and regarded me with disapproval.

With her present, Maria Olivieri resumed her former manner with me; yet I felt that of the three women, only Stella was my friend at heart; a circumstance I could not fathom.

Old Olivieri, coming in to supper and finding the Aunt at table, greeted her curtly, and gave me, this time, a long look of which the pity was unmistakable.

"Well, now!" says his wife cheerfully. "Ask a blessing, Antonio, and let's to work, for the walk hath made me hungry as a hunter."

"What I do not clearly understand," says the aunt, on the heels of the piety, laying down her knitting and taking up her knife, "is how Stella came to meet the young man—"

"Francesco!" says her sister.

"—to meet Francesco again. He was sitting in the street?"

"Aye," says Stella laughing, and speaking hastily to conceal the state in which she had found me, "and the strange thing of it was, Aunt, that he knew me not. 'Nay,' says he, when I told him what I was, 'for the girl I wed was not in the least like thee.' And he even gave me a description of her. 'She was older,' quotha, 'and likewise taller than thou; she had eyes of a different shape, and she was dressed in white.' "

"He did not say that she was prettier, or more modest, or a better housekeeper, I wager," says her mother, "for well we know that could not be."

"Oh, hush!" says Stella, blushing and looking prettier than ever.

"He must have dreamt the duke had wed him to his Grace's sister, the Countess Anita," says the aunt, smiling maliciously. "That is her description as near as need be."

My heart gave a sudden thud. The Countess Anita—sure, she had indeed been in the cabinet, discussing some marriage with the duke—

"Well, his Grace did the next best thing," laughs Stella, "giving—"

"The next best thing!" cries her mother. "He gave him a better wife than that hussy will ever make."

"Silence, Maria!" says old Olivieri.

"Well, I—"

"I meant that he had given him the money to start a shop," falters Stella, much ashamed.

There was a silence, while Antonio shook his head warningly at his wife, picking a bone meantime; and then the aunt spoke again.

"What passeth my understanding," says she, in a great dull voice, "is that the young man should be so willing to take the money—which was given to the wife—and so unwilling to take the wife."

"Sara!" thunders Olivieri, as I bolted up, all pale and furious, from my chair.

"Well, I speak the truth, as thou knowest, Antonio," says the aunt, "and if, it shames the devil, I'm not to blame. 'Tis not to be denied, I suppose, that of twenty young men that were hanging about here before this accursed marriage, willing to sell their souls for a sight of Stella going out to market, not one remains—as why should they, honest lads, and she a married woman. Daughters are made to be married off and kept by their husbands; and when I heard of this affair, it was for *thy* sake, Antonio, that I thanked God money had come to her at least, wherewith she could relieve thy charges a little. Now, if she is to be left on thy hands and the money taken away and thou art fool enough to be willing when it hath been shown to thee—I've no more to say."

"It is well!" says Antonio. "Take thy seat again, boy, and on with thy dinner."

But there was no more dinner for me; I felt the next morsel would have choked me; nor would I sit. Stella had also risen, and was weeping bitterly at the other end of the table.

"The plan was not mine," I told the great-faced woman, "nor have I ever consented to it; nor will I stay—stay here longer."

My lips were too stiff to say more, though at the door, going out, I turned and muttered a good-even to old Antonio, and looked at Stella.

The air outside was cold, and I had no cloak nor hat; but I felt it not, so raging within was I at my treatment by yon old maid; I did not hear footsteps running behind me, nor the sobbing cries of Stella until she was by my side, sobbing still, and so out of breath that she could hardly speak. Nay, she seemed like to fall; so I caught my arm about her, and her head fell on my shoulder.

"O Francesco!" she cried, there in the dark street. "O Francesco—Francesco!"

"There, there," says I, " 'twas not thy fault."

"I could—k-kill that old fat beast!" she sobbed. "I was so happy in—in my plan, Francesco; thy little sh-shop and all the b-bright stuffs!"

The thought of the cloths sent her off into a passion of tears; and as it were, I patted her hair—crisp and soft it was, and scented against my cheek. There was a great moon over the houses on the other side of the road; it shone on the cross where I had killed the count.

"Nay, nay," I said, the fury that had driven me from the house dying down with a strange suddenness. "Nay, nay. Thou'rt all that is good and sweet, and I shall think oft of thy kindness."

How she did weep! As I patted her hair again, her arm stole about my neck; and then—I kissed her; in comfort, as I remember it; her cheeks were cold and wet with tears; and she sobbed and clung closer; I must needs kiss her again.

This time, my lips met hers.

They clung—

* * *

What matter means, after all: *respice finem;* the end is the thing.

And the end of this was, that a shop was found, and stocked with as much cloth as might be; and that when I went to occupy it, Stella—Stella Olivieri no more, but Stella Vitali—went with me.

CHAPTER VII

OF MY SHOP

SHE wore a decent gown of black to serve the shop withal; and, having returned her father's russet, I likewise was endued with that funereal hue; it was the proper thing for shopkeepers in our station. Then, too, it was obligatory in the eyes of Stella's mother, eke of her aunt, and (as I then suspected, but as I now know) in those of Stella herself, that we should have made festival costumes for the wedding that was now to take place anew; which costumes, as far as I could see, would never serve us again; because such costumes were by some persons unknown, expected of us. Moreover, being now wed, the girl must lay aside her excellent russet dress with the fur, and have a new one; I also, a suit different from my shop-serving apparel, wherein to pass along the streets; this, like everything else, was the proper thing.

At first, I laughed at Maria Olivieri and her abominable sister as they pronounced these laws; and suggested that with the little money we had, it were better to buy our stock with cash, letting the clothes go until our trade permitted us to buy them for cash, too; but it was not long before I saw they were in deadly earnest; regarding the clothes prescribed as equally necessary for our entrance into business, as is the Mass to salvation—nay, more so; for the Lord is debonair, whereas the folk with whom our trade would lie stood ready to damn the saints if they were not habited according to the rules.

"My father hath had but one suit at a time, so long as I can remember," I protested.

"And what is thy father, young man?" says Aunt Sara.

"A—a—musician."

"Ah!" says Aunt Sara, "but nobody cares what a musician may wear or may not wear; 'a can fiddle in his bare buff if need be. Thou'rt among decent folk though, now, my lad; and I know I, for one, would go to the other side of the town before I'd buy of a man that dressed like a rubbish-heap, or kept his wife so, either."

"That would not I," says old Antonio, who with his splinter of wood, was ever on my side.

"Oh, thou!" says his wife. "Thou'rt as wild in thy ideas as Francesco."

"—nor any other man," added Olivieri.

"But it is not men that buy cloth," snaps Aunt Sara; with such finality that I had not heart to put forth the truths that our best promised customer was a man, and that the whole market had commended our economy; she would have called me a fool and, by the standards of decent folk, had proved me one.

After much forced inspection of these standards, and utter failure to understand whence they were derived, or what their end might be, at last I reconciled myself to my ignorance, and followed blindly where the women led.

Our shop was at the Sign of the Sword, because that would remind all comers of our adventure, and because Antonio Olivieri could give us an old sword for nothing, to hang over the doorway; we were very happy, and trade, from the first day, came flowing most mightily to us. We had sold all our stock, and replenished it twice, ere I noticed what seemed to me a change in Stella.

Payment for our new stuffs was due, and hardly to be met when, returning from her mother's house one even, she told me she must have a velvet dress, and that it was not meet for her to serve in the shop.

"Why not?" says I, thunderstruck, yet perceiving (as in a flash of lightning) that Maria Olivieri and Aunt Sara had been hinting at this before.

"Because we are prospering, forsooth!" says Stella. "It is not meet that the wife of a prosperous merchant should work as shop-boy. There hath been talk about it in the neighborhood."

"But sure," says I, "we must pay our bills ere we spend money on shop-boys to please strangers?"

"Our customers are not strangers," says Stella, "it is they give thee the money to pay thy bills withal, Francesco. This is my mother's word, and thou knowest how her advice hath sped us so far— Besides, what is the use of prosperity, if the neighbors are to think us poor as church mice?"

It was my rede that our prosperity was due rather to the fame the duke had spread abroad about us; meseemed that the rush of buyers was diminishing as the adventure became less clear in folk's minds. Prosperity, moreover, had other uses than ostentation; which I was about to expound when Stella began to sob.

"Only yesterday, in the great square," she said, "a woman did mock at my mother, saying 'Thy daughter's husband doth not seem to be such a miraculous catch after all'—they were coming from the chapel, and there had been preaching on the draught of fishes, and the taunt was from Holy Writ. Oh, oh!"

I went over and put my arm about the girl.

"Certes, the woman's spirit was not Christian," says I, meaning to comfort her; but to my amaze, she flew to the aid of her mother's oppressor.

"Why, thou criest 'Poverty!' loud enough!" says Stella, putting me away. "'Tis not unchristian to hear thee!"

"'Twas malicious to speak of it," I stammered, feeling myself sink again into the morass of incomprehension.

"It would have been worse to let thee go on thy way unwarned of thy fault," says my wife, staring at me angrily with her tear-filled eyes—

We had the shop-boy; Stella had her dress; the cloth remained unpaid for, and, little by little, our customers left us one by one, nevertheless, and went to larger shops which had a greater variety of stuffs, and could sell cheaper.

"And no wonder they sell cheaper," says Aunt Sara, when I told of this at Olivieri's one Sunday, "when thou'rt fool enough to have a yard-stick a full ell long."

She had told me, over the matter of the shop-boy, that I could make his keep and a profit, but cutting a thumb's breadth off my measures; said every mercer in town did it, and I had called them thieves if it were true.

"I'll not do it," I said again, "'tis a mean dishonesty."

Aunt Sara flung down her knitting.

"A fine word to come to us, from the mouth of a lad we picked up starving in the streets and drunk to boot—ah, yes, I know, my fine sir; drunk thou wert, and had been for a week! Dishonest, quotha! And what was it to take Stella's money, and put it into a business thou'rt too lily-handed to manage? I'll say no more—why should I give help and be insulted?—but this I will say, young man; already thou'st brought enough sidewise glances on this family, and if thy stiff neck continues, and thou'lt hold thyself still superior to them that have been in the trade before thou was born, thou'lt show us a bankruptcy. Now!"

Antonio was abroad; Maria Olivieri sat sewing and agreeing; even Stella said naught.

" 'Tis theft, though," I maintained doggedly, "and I'll none of it."

And for this one thing I do thank God, that my ell was an ell until the end—I thank God because well I know persuasion would have shortened it at last; persuasion of the old kind; that I was a stranger to these folk, knowing not the customs, and to be advised by those that did and had mine interests at heart—save that one day, when we had kept our shop ten months, came a letter from my aunt in Rome, saying that my brother Paolo had been drowned at sea; that my father had fallen very ill when he heard of it; and that, if I would see the old man, alive, I must come quickly.

The next day, leaving Stella in charge of the mercery, I set forth on a hired horse.

I had adventures on the road—old Olivieri had given me a sword, and with it I slew my third man (a hardy robber) outside Leghorn. I had adventures in Rome, too. My father's master, the good Signor Astraldi he had served so long, wished to withhold certain wages that were due, and, more, to filch the few chattels of which his servant died possessed, on account of a loan long since repaid. These adventures, however, I shall not recount; there are few, even today, that win to Rome without killing or being killed; and never heard I yet of a dying man that had not some one about him ready to steal his sheets.

Besides, both as regards the clash of steel and the whisper of negotiation, greater things were to come to me; to which this journey to Rome, and the three months' stay perforce I made there, proved the path.

This is all I have to recount:

My father was unconscious still when I came; for a month I nursed him; but though he seemed to know me, he could not speak until two hours before he died. This was in the little hours of the morning; it was very cold, and I was dozing in a chair by his bedside, having been there since the evening meal. My hand was in his, and of a sudden he awoke and pressed it; murmuring the while:

"Paolo! Paolo! My dear son!"

I brought the candle nearer, and leaned over him.

"Nay, father," says I, my heart bounding with joy that he had recovered his speech, "it is Francesco."

My father looked into my eyes for some time.

"Aye, Francesco," says he, but in another tone; and appeared to consider. "But—why art thou not at Rometia, with thy rich wife and thy mercery?"

"The mercery prospers mightily," I lied, to cheer him, "and I am come to visit thee, father."

He did not answer for a long time; his breathing was very weak; I dared not go for the physician lest he should die alone.

"Aye," he said at last, "thou wast always the prudent one, Francesco; a great head—for business; thou took after thy mother, I suppose—"

He could hardly speak, and indeed stopped again for a long time.

"Not—like the others," he went on at last, looking away from me, to the dim ceiling where ghosts seemed to flap black wings to and fro as the candle flickered, "not like—Paolo; no mercery for him—nay nay! His—father's—son. The—wet deck—the mighty waves—snatch money from the—teeth of death; fling it—in the face—of life!"

My heart seemed suddenly to chill and contract.

"Gallant—" came a whisper from the bed; then, after a time, a low chuckle; of bitter scorn:

"No safe tradesman—his father's son—"

Then, of a sudden, while these last words dripped ice upon my soul even as the chill grip of his hand had turned mine arm to lead, he sat upright, loosed my hand, and stretched forth both his own:

"Paolo! My dear son!" he cried again in a loud voice; and was dead.

I laid him out, there in the cold room, with the cold, lonely wind moaning without, and the bells of the fire-watch striking the hour of one; and I knelt by the bed and prayed for the repose of his soul; and I sat in the chair keeping vigil over what was mortal of him until the dawn.

But I could not weep.

From that time onward, behold, in place of the boy I had been, a man; distinguished from my former self by this death-bed initiation to the elder way of thought, and by my consequent suspicion of my fellow man. I perceived that old Porsini and my father, though different in their affection for me, had been at one in their abuse of my ignorance; each, premising that I was too young to know my own advantage, had counseled me for his own advantage, to a course of life in which he did not believe.

This perception hardened the corners of my mouth forever; narrowed the innocent blue stare of my youth; and—*primus in orbe*—made me most brutal in my dealings with old Astraldi. He had a long white beard and a benevolent expression of senility which, before my father had called Paolo his dear son and me a safe merchant, would have steaded him better than sealed bonds as to the debt he alleged. Now I called him a thief more willingly than if he had been twenty.

"This," he gasped, "to my white hairs?"

"Nay," says I, laughing at him, "but to the body that wears 'em; or rather the mind inside that. It hath not been my experience, venerable sir, whatever others may say, that the soul mellows in the cobwebbed body like wine in a bottle. So if thou'st not a bond of my father, and his discharge of the five ducats wages, I will take the one, and I will not pay the other."

"I thought no bond was necessary—"

"Then thy white hairs have not even brought thee wisdom," I mocked him, "and from wisdom to honesty is still a far cry. Give me the five ducats, then, old man."

He eyed me, incredulous; but at last he laid out a receipt and counted over the money, giving a separate groan at each piece. I paid for my father's burial with it, and walked that morning in the Pincio, sick at heart. Aye; and in the afternoon, still fasting, I found my feet bearing me toward a wine-shop, had not a miracle intervened at the door whereof, God alone knows what might have become of me; the knowledge that my father had been but mortal, whenas I had sacrificed my life so far to his infallibility, had been a heavier blow than the discovery that old Porsini was a liar.

But as my foot fell on the threshold, a great voice from within called, "Hi! The reckoning! Boot and saddle, lads!"—and the very sergeant that had arrested me in Rometia came forth to squint at the time by the sun; a hunk of bread and cheese in his hand, and his pink beard all dabbled with wine. He recognized me at the same time, and with the same amazement, as I him. From the room behind, as we stared at each other, came the grunts of unwilling men rising, and the rattle of their armor as they donned it again.

"Why is't thou?" mumbles the sergeant. "The swashbuckling mercer, *per Bacco*, so far from his home? How art thou, lad; and what hast thou been doing to thine eyes?"

"My father is dead, and I have buried him."

He shoved the last morsel of bread into his mouth with his thumb, and champed it while considering me.

"That may be it," he said at last, "though stab me if my old dad's flight to Heaven left me looking so angry. Did'a leave all's money to the Church, or the like?"

"He had none," says I.

"Then shouldst be glad of his happy release," roars the sergeant, smiting me on the shoulder so that almost I fell down. "This world is no place for a man without money. Well—come, hasten, you fellows within there! Pietro, do thou pay the score and remember one of the bottles was but half full. We leave in ten minutes."

"Whither?" I asked.

"Rometia, by ——, and time, too; three weeks have we been cooling our heels here, a-waiting for a paper of some kind from His Holiness the Pope (touch your hat, it is the custom here)—I could have written it myself in ten minutes, and God knows I'm no clerk; but nay, the duke's agent must have audience after audience, first with this one and then with that—" (he made the motion with his fingers, as one who counts out money)—"thou knowest, and so we got it but an hour ago. Art thou returning?"

"Soon," says I.

"Then go, return now; get thy horse and come with us; thy luck's in hand, young man; thou'rt just the sweet morsel Pietro Uccello would delight to roast alive."

"Pietro Uccello?"

"Aye—used to be officer to that count thou stabbed; went home and took his master's guard, that had had no pay for months and made shavers of 'em."

"Shavers?"

"Aye—shave the country; take the traveler's purse and the peasant's pig, and flay passers-by alive for their amusement. But I can't be standing here all day— Go get thy horse, and hasten. Disciplina, let me speak scarce a word all the way hither, and thou'lt have enough of my talk ere we reach the South Gate."

I traveled with them accordingly; and glad was I to have done it. By this time, our duke's schemes for uniting various divided lands under his own rule were succeeding woundily; and all along the road, we met savage bands of the dispossessed—peasants flung off their land by the order of the new master; ignorant of what had befallen them, starving and sullen, ravening together in packs like wolves; item, knots of half-armed soldiery, leaderless and most like with prices on their heads, having fought for their masters against the duke, and been abandoned to him in defeat; luckily there were no large bands of these, such as that of mine old acquaintance Uccello.

"Why doth the duke not put him down?" I asked.

The sergeant laughed.

"Easier said than done—a band like unto that, here today , gone tomorrow, and devils unchained if we did catch up with 'em."

"Uccello hath a father in Rometia, right under the duke's nose."

"Aye, *per Bacco*, and did we not arrest him, and the duke make a proclamation that he'd hang him for conspiracy if his son left not the duchy; whereunto the son aforesaid replied, 'Hang away'."

"Oh!"

"Ah. So the old man's taxes were doubled, or some such thing, and for quits Pietro nailed a tax-gatherer's hide to the outside of the north gate—let's see, two nights afore we left— Speaking of taxes, 'tis a pity thou'rt paying them."

"Wherefore?" I asked.

"Well, 'tis soldiers the duke wants now—the burghers are but his milch-cows, and he milketh them dry; and by all accounts he was mightily taken with you. Why, thy name's on the captain's list now, to be enlisted whenever thou wilt; the which is rare."

I remembered the words of Alessandro, and the mocking smile that went with them— "Innocents like thee make ever the best bravos at last—there will always be a place in my guard—*a riverderci*, Francesco!"

Innocents make always the best bravos at last! Aye, I was beginning to believe it.

"The pay is good," says the sergeant, "there's aye promotion to be had, 'specially for a clerk, now that most of the duke's dirty work is done on paper; thank God I got to be sergeant when it was a matter of cold steel; but if I had thy hand of write now, I'd be sub-lieutenant when this one dies—which can't be long, though God forbid it."

"It was as sub-lieutenant that the duke would have enlisted me," says I.

"Oh, ah?" says my companion dryly. "Well—we've had two or three since yon."

This was on the third day, and we came out of a thick wood into sight of a watch-tower on a hill; which the sergeant hailed with delight, followed by all the men of his command.

"Two hours home!" he roared; and behind us the files began to chatter obscenely; never, at that time, had I heard the like; and disgusted, I said meseemed this was a time to order silence. Of ordinary, Pink-Beard kept the strictest discipline; if talk from the ranks reached his ears—it must be riotous to do so, for we rode ten yards in advance—he was accustomed to bellow a rebuke, even in the wildest country, and of the most harmless words.

When he turned in his saddle to stare at me, I contrasted this state with his present silence; and he laughed.

"Aye, aye," says he, "but I'll explain—not that my orders are any business of thine, young man—that these fellows can well save their idle chatter until such time as they are off duty; it hurts them not, bottled up, and it doth them no good coming forth; whereas this that so shocks thee is what, repressed, causeth mutinies. 'Tis for the sake of discipline that, forbidding the other, I permit this."

"It is very ill talk," says I.

"So they say that think such things and keep quiet," says the sergeant, "but no matter for that; the duke pays me to manage soldiers, not to make saints, even if 'twere possible; hypocrites is the best I could turn this lot into, or any other lot ever I saw."

We rode along for some time in silence; then I perceived Pink-Beard looking sidelong at me, grinning.

"What, then?"

He laughed outright.

"When thou comest to us, 'twill be hard for thee at first," says he, "and belike thou'lt have a bloody nose and a cursed soul or two; but 'twill be worth it, in the end. I know the look in thine eye, go to! We live not long, we soldiers, but while we do, 'tis air we breathe, and not water muddied with lies, like those fish-faced burghers. Ho, ho, ho! Thou'lt not be a mercer long; thou lackest the gills."

We were now in sight of the walls—the bugle of the watch blew at the instant; and Pink-Beard turned in his saddle, bursting in on a roar of ribald laughter with a ferocious command—

"Silence!"

He did not turn back again at once; but winking at the snubbed faces of the soldiers, and pointing at the city gate, added:

"*Zitti; muovetevi!*"

There was more guffaws; and then we marched decorously past the gate guard, into the town; in half an hour Stella and I were weeping and laughing in each other's arms.

Mistake me not, O brother of the future! No word shall be said against Stella Olivieri; sweet and virtuous was she; industrious, faithful and affectionate; oft had she comforted me, striving to find answers to questions she did not understand, when after long days of rasping cloth through my fingers, I would gloom in the evenings over that sickening dull life; recount the lies I had had to tell, and the insults I had been forced to brook; instead of taking her forth in her best gown, to hear the music in the great square like other young wives.

Everything that was possible to her, did she for me; it hath weighed upon me heavily since, more specially since the cure of souls hath been my work, that I did not more for her; I tried, but for mine own sake, to enlighten her in those matters of the unpaid bills, the ostentation at the expense of others, and the shortened ell-measure covered by a new frock; but, since my concern was selfish, I let her go, when the pull of her mother, her aunt, of all relations and advisers, became too strong; rather than be dragged down into the mud myself.

Mea culpa! Mea culpa!

While I had been gone, the shop's trade had fallen off to nothing; seeing which, the suppliers of our stock had demanded their money with threats of the law; and in a last struggle—barely a week ago, she assured me with agonized tears, and scarce three people served since then—Stella had haggled a good two inches off the yard-stick in the shop; a pitiful, innocent cheat; the splintered end of the measure (which I held out to her like a gory sword) would have convicted a Mede or a Persian; at sight of it in my hands, she moaned and fell on her knees to me.

Thank God, I picked her up with horror; knowing, even in my hard-heartedness, that my imperfections in the whole were likely greater than hers; as they were, indeed; as they were.

"It was for thy sake," she wept bitterly.

"Was it for my sake—to cover me thus with shame?" I demanded sternly.

"It was to cover thy back with cloth, and to fill thy belly with food!" she stormed suddenly, wrenching herself away in the pride of this justification.

"I would sooner have no clothes—and no shame," says I.

"'Tis easy to say, when thou'rt full fed and warm," she replied. (I had heard her mother say the same thing a dozen times.) "There would be a different saying had thou come home and found the house bare and the oven cold; a little shame, as thou pleasest to call it, would have seemed cheap price for—"

Methought there was no convincing of her; we spoke to one another, as it were, in tongues foreign each to the other; estimating each the other's valuables in coinage of words having no common value. Moreover, though she had not yet told me of it, she was in the way to have a child; and women in that state lean not heavily upon reason.

"The house shall be bare, and the oven cold, soon enough at best, by what thou tellest me," I said, sitting gloomily down and thinking of the high hearts, with which, my unwillingness to the business notwithstanding, we had taken up our abode together under our Sign of the Sword.

She knelt by me, comforting as ever—but in her own language; poor child, what other could she use, that knew not mine.

"Nay, nay," says she, stroking my hair, "nay, Francesco; indeed, I think not. This very night, by chance, will there come here a man learned in these matters; he is a friend of my mother who hath failed in business four several times himself, and yet is now rich. He will counsel us—"

"As to what?" says I, bolting from my chair and staring down at her. I had the yardstick still in my hand, and belike she thought I was to strike her with it. She shrank from me and laid her head on the wooden bench and moaned piteously; yet in the pride of my honesty did I not pity her.

"As to a means to keep the folk who have trusted us out of their goods and their money both?" I stormed. "That we may drag on filthy lives, scorning ourselves as this red-haired, crook-legged abomination Pozzi—aye, 'tis he, then—hath not the soul to do. Nay, by ——, never!"

How strange must I have looked to the just men looking down from Heaven, their mild virtue flown to my head like wine, their gentle law of life flushing my cheeks with rage, standing my hair absurdly up on end and driving me raging to the door, while that poor girl sobbed by the empty dishes she had filled for me!

Mea Culpa!

"Where art thou going?" she cried, half rising in her anxiety lest I should catch cold, rushing forth into the evening without hat or cloak.

"Where I should have gone in the beginning!" says I wildly. "I have been belied, and bedeviled, and bemired, but by ——, I will breathe clean air from this on. I go to join the duke's guard!"

I slammed the windy door on her cry of despair and was off, running, to the palace.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE DUKE

THE duke was absent from the capital on affairs of state; still arranging (I learned later) that marriage of the Countess Anita's, which I had heard discussed in the cabinet; but luckily his instructions concerning me had been express, and when I presented myself, I was enlisted out of hand—as a simple soldier.

"'A was to have been taken on as sub-lieutenant," says my friend the sergeant, who stood by while the captain wrote down my particulars.

The officer chuckled with his pen in his mouth, shaking sand on the page before taking a new one.

"The gaining of promotion is better than the having of it," says he, "so thou'lt—Ah, God's body, 'tis thou that's wed, is't not?"

"This is the young man I spoke of but now, Captain," says the sergeant. "He that—"

"Aye, aye: I remember."

He stared at me with some interest.

"Now he tells me that his mercery is bankrupt, and that soon he shall be put to the door of his house, Captain —"

"Aye, aye. Thou told me before. Is any house of ours in the town empty?"

"Three of them, Captain."

"Then give him the best of them," says the officer, writing again," and since he's such a favorite of thine, he shall be in thy company, Sergeant. Now, is there aught else?"

"As to arms—?" I queried.

"Oh, his Highness doth provide everything; but learn thou to use them first, my lad. Thy lot are at the Citadel this week, Caporetto."

(The sergeant's name was Lucio di Caporetto; he had no family name, being a carpenter's bastard.)

"Aye, Captain."

"Take this young man with thee, then; and while instructing him, for God his love, try to teach something to that whelp of a sub-lieutenant; I thought he would be safe in command this week, with all the old hands away in the duke's train, but already he hath six men in confinement for drunkenness, and with the walls to look after, and Lieutenant Michele away with the escort, I can not forever be running up that hill."

"Aye, Captain."

"Then good night, old fox; good night, young man; let me hear good reports of thee."

And good reports he did hear; for, launched at last on the current of mine inclinations, I made as good a soldier as I had been a bad mercer, which is much to say. I was quick at the drill; I astonished the sergeant (who instructed me for love, sword-play not being in the curriculum) by the rapidity of my advance in the use of the rapier; nay, it was I first thought of the oaken counterparts of the sword now generally used, which hasten proficiency by permitting a similitude of combat.

It was with one of these that Lucio, showing me the cut designed to spoil both an adversary's eyes, gave me the bloody nose he had prophesied riding from Rome; the cursed soul had I never, for (as happens oft with the newly disillusioned) I had for the nonce become more cynical than Lucio himself.

This attitude of mind, though it did not long withstand the torrent of my delight at being a full-armed soldier of the Guard, was mightily useful in my dealings with Maria Olivieri and that eternal Aunt Sara; of course, seeing us about to give up our pretensions and be merely happy, they descended upon us raving; and, sure of myself for the first time in my commerce with them, I put them to the door.

"What will be said when 'tis known that my daughter is living in a cottage of the soldiery!" moans Maria, wringing her hands as she departed.

"If thou come not here, no one need know," says I. "Tell inquirers that we have concealed a thousand ducats from our creditors, and fled to Padua with't. That will cover our shame; and so good night."

When I had shut the door on them, Stella confronted me, indignant at my use of her relations—for one minute she reproached me; and then she began to laugh, for that I was master in my own house at last, and with all her filial duty, she would it rather. Besides, she was not separated from her father, who would come in, chewing his stick, on my nights off duty, and sup with us, and hope the baby would be either a girl or a boy; his means of saying he cared not which, so only it was a baby, and ours.

Once, after Stella had gone singing to bed, and we two were sitting by the fire, I caught him considering me sidewise, and asked him wherefore; to which he answered, that he was thinking how I had cut through, after all, to my purpose of being a soldier.

"Was that all?"

"Aye—nay, I was wondering whether I was ill-starred or lucky, to be born with a different mind from thine, Francesco."

Of course, 'twas my opinion that he had been unfortunate; but I said naught, save that we were most happy. He chewed his splinters and nodded, and considered the flames in the chimney-place.

"Aye," says old Antonio, "that I do see most clearly, my son; 'tis but that I ask myself how long it will last— Every garden is sweet to the newcomer, so to say; but after a time his accustomed eye doth notice here a weed, here a flower whose color likes him not. Ah, well; some there be who say, ''Tis but an earthly garden; so that the good overbalance the bad, 'tis all I dare expect'; others again, not so resigned, yet are too tender to uproot the offending plants; and they live there happily enow."

He fell into silence.

"Well?"

"Well, thou, Francesco *mio*, dost demand perfection; and of late there is a hardness in thee—thou'd uproot whole gardens for one sorry weed. Doubtless, 'tis well; but how shalt thou ever have an habitation?"

It was not over-clear to me what he might mean; so I turned the thing off with a laugh, saying that I had a habitation now, at all events.

Antonio laughed too.

"So have I," he said, rising and stretching his long limbs, "and 'tis time I went thither. Ah me! Thou'lt parade to meet the duke on his return to-morrow?"

"My corporal hath his face all swelled with the toothache, and I have his place," I responded with pride. "Shalt thou be there?"

"Nay, nay; I've seen enough o' dukes; rather 'tis that rat of a treasurer I'd meet and have speech with—money he oweth to me these six months, and ever an excuse instead of cash. Ever thus with princes; it argueth their power to make folk wait; your sergeant told me yest'reen that the dozen of them wasted three weeks in Rome, getting that dispensation for the countess' marriage."

"Dispensation?"

"Aye; this fellow she's to wed is married already, or some such coil. But there, there. If I get not my rest, I'll be making scythes instead of swords in the morning. Good night, my son."

He strode off through the moonlight; I closed the door, and returned to the fire to burnish my equipment for the morrow; salad, with a red plume to show I was in the second company of guards, the plume of the first being white; breastplate with the duke's monogram inlaid with gold—

I was studying this, and wondering if the inlay would come out under the burnisher, when a knock fell on the door.

"Who's there?" I cried.

There was no answer.

"Who's there?"

Again no reply; but instead, a soft, impatient rapping. I took my sword and drew the bolt; Sergeant Lucio stood without, but in a breath he had pushed past me, and bolted the door again.

"By the devil his horns, Francesco, I despair of thee—in the service thus long, and when a knock falls on thy door at night, howling, 'Who's there?—who's there?' like a calf."

"Thou'd never told me not to do so," I said sulkily.

"I left so much to the brains God gave thee to be born withal," says Lucio angrily, "but it seems thou'st lost them on the way hither. I've not come all the way from the citadel to the palace, and spoken an hour on thy behalf, and come here myself, to have my presence published to all Italy—nor to be argued with, either. Hast anything to drink?"

I gave him a flagon of wine, which somewhat mollified him; and then he demanded if Stella were asleep.

"Aye, hours since."

"I'll e'en trollop up the stairs and see," quotha, "these things must not be left to hearsay. Give me the candle, and look not so glum, lad. God wot, 'tis no treat for me to see a wife in bed; I've four myself."

He took a candle, went up-stairs with a singular softness considering his size, listened, and returned.

"All's well; but we'll shut the stair-door and deny ourselves the pleasure of shouting," says he. "The matter is thus, Francesco; his Grace's secretary hath pushed ahead of the duke's party, with instructions for the captain, which he was at's wit's end to fulfill, until he called me into council; I suggested thee, and thou'rt selected (if canst be relied on to cease shouting 'Who's there?' and the like) for work that may bring thee promotion quicker than thou expected. The sub-lieutenant is naught, and will remain so."

My heart bounded with delight; my finger-tips tingled; I leaned forward in my chair close to Lucio's beard, and he eyed me indulgently while he fumbled in his breast.

"Thou'lt begone tonight," says he, pulling out a slip of parchment, "and 'tis to the villa of Madonna Rosa Salviati, an hour's ride out on the Siena road, that thou goest. 'Tis a little after nine, and thou'lt be there before eleven."

"Aye, but sure the lady will be in bed."

"Well, then, get her out of it! What's thy gloom about now?"

"A Salviati—" says I, doubtfully.

"O ——, I forgot, thou knowest her not, being a stranger. She's no Salviati, lad—'tis a name she hath taken, which incenseth the duke more, he being a relation of the family."

"What is she, then?"

"Oh, a whore," says the sergeant, "but the grief is, that she hath bewhored this count our Lady Anita is to wed, so that the poor old fool beginneth to balk at the contract. Which may not be, when the duke hath set his heart on the same, and two thousand acres coming under his sway at the wedding. I tell thee this, though 'tis none of thy business, to show thee the matter is grave."

"Aye. But what is my business therein?"

"Marry, to get the wench out of the way, as his Highness commands. Sithee, Francesco, and attend to me; this slip of parchment beareth the word 'Alessandro,' with a cipher below; it is not in the duke's hand of write, but in his secretary's; it will serve either as a warrant to the warden of the Tower of San Marco, to accept and keep the prisoner thou presentest to him; or as an order on the duke's treasurer for twenty thousand crowns. If it falls into hands for which it is not intended, moreover, the duke can deny all knowledge of it; as (if *thou* fallest into wrong hands) he can deny all knowledge of *thee;* thou'rt not well known to belong to the guard. I've a new suit of clothes outside the door in a bundle, and a strange horse ready for thee at the corner of the street."

"Why all this?"

"God's body and blood, if the count found the duke was interfering in his affairs before the marriage, would he not break the affair off with an appearance of justice? Sure, that is his desire; he hath come to know that after the marriage, there will be interference enough. But enough of questioning. Do what thou art told; fall not into any one's hands, and it shall be well for thee. There are the clothes. Put them on."

"Had I not better tell my wife I'm ordered to the citadel, while yet I wear my ordinary—?"

"Aye. Well thought. But hurry."

I hurried—my mind whirling—as well as I could for Stella's half-awakened terror at the sudden summons. She flung her sleep-warmed arms about my neck, and said she would rise and get me a hot drink ere I left; but that might not be, for the haste I was in, and, after I had comforted her a little, alleging that a sentry had fallen off the wall and broken his neck, so that I must relieve him, she lay back murmuring that I must be careful.

When I descended, Lucio was tearing his beard with impatience, and laying forth a very rich satin suit on the table.

"This is to gain thee admission," says he. "Put it on, a God's mercy, and I'll help thee with the points."

"But what do I when I have gained admission?"

"Have I not told thee already, fool? Make sure there is no one to overhear; and then tell her she hath the two choices—of going into a dungeon under thy charge this night; or coming into Rometia and drawing twenty thousand crowns for journey-money to leave the country. The duke commands that she relinquish this count; she may have her choice as to the way of it."

"I am to tell her this?"

Even as Lucio had expounded the task, my heart had slowly sunk; at first, the adventure had seemed gallant; the luster had gone from that ere many words; now it appeared that this high task the duke had set me was the bullying of a woman.

"Of course thou'rt to tell her this! And since the duke is to say thou'rt a common ruffian if aught goes wrong, better say it as roughly as may be; she'll understand thee better so."

"But if she will not see me?"

"Why, by the fiery plains of ——, if 'a won't be courteous, then smash the door down; break the servant's head; and now in the name of the saints, come mount and be off ere I change my mind about thy fitness."

"I am indeed unfit for —"

"Well, thou'd better fit thyself to obey orders on the way over, then," says Lucio harshly. "It will not do to fail, mark me, boy, unless thou'st an itch to see thyself thrown out of the guard, and thy wife in her trouble put out of this house into the street; the duke'd do it in a minute, 'a's done it before. Now—put out the light. Thou'st thine own sword, eh? Then, forward!"

When I was mounted, he seemed to experience some little softening of the heart; of which, since it added worse news to bad, I could well have excused him.

"There's a mask in the right pocket of the saddle," he told me. "Wear it during thy dealings there. And sithee, Francesco: whatever thou dost, fall not into the hands of the count. Thou'lt be on his land; he hath the right of justice down there—and the duke will disown thee."

"Is that all?" I asked, not looking down at my sergeant.

"Aye," says Lucio reluctantly. "Saints with thee, lad. There'll be promotion, thou knowest—"

So I departed; small use, I think, to describe my thoughts as I rode through the night; only, as I in my turn clattered breakneck over the cobblestones, sparks flying hither-skither under me, shouting, "Gate, gate, on the duke's service!"— I wondered if any shop-boy was lying awake in his garret, as I had done; and pitied the poor fool. Doubtless his elders would be busy telling him of the drab side of his gallant picture—saying in their ignorance 'twas lying out on fields of battle and being knocked on the head; whereas in fact the danger that confronted me was mighty pleasant, and what weighed on my heart like lead was the easy part of my task.

The road was bad; the night grew darker when I had left the town behind; nearer a two-hours' ride made I of it, than one, and would willingly have spent more time still on the way, save that lights appeared inexorably between the white marble columns of a house to the right of the road, and I knew that the time for duty had arrived.

Dismounting, putting on my mask and, in my distaste for the work in hand, pausing not even to wonder why the occupants of the place were awake at near midnight, I tied my horse to the gatepost, stumbled up a dark path and arrived cursing at the front door; whereon I knocked.

For a moment there was silence; then, from within, a man's voice demanded gently—

"Who is there?"

"'Tis a gentleman to see Madonna Rosa Salviati—urgently!" says I.

After some consideration, the voice replied—having changed its tone to that of a servant who knoweth with whom he hath to deal, and respecteth him not—

"Madonna can not receive—"

A chill gust of wind came about the

house, and eddied into my ears; angry, I whipped out my sword, and hammered on the door until the house reechoed.

"Speak not so to me, dog, and leave me out here in the wind, or by God's hooks, I'll have thine ears. Open the door!"

There was another silence; the voice retook its former tone—

"But, my lord—"

"Open!" I shouted, thundering on the wood.

Silence again; a whispering; at last, much drawing of bolts, turning of keys and so forth; at the end of which, the portal swung back—a hand's breadth—held from opening any farther by two stout chains, one above and one below the lock. In this aperture there appeared, true enough, the red head of a most slimy-looking manservant; but it was no use to break it according to Lucio's rede—the door would have remained impassable, while also behind this fellow I perceived another in livery, who nursed a pistolet. These things were little known at that time, save for the use of nobles; it was evident to me that the count directed the guarding of this house.

"My lord will save himself trouble by going," says Red-Head.

Woundily did I believe it.

"Thou'lt save thyself worse than trouble by opening this door, rascal," says I.

He had the impudence to grin. Ah, ah! Noble though I might be, it was his perquisite to mock my errand—as he conceived it—and my ridiculous condition.

"I have orders not to open, my lord," he answered, "nor is disturbance to be permitted— There are three of us, and all armed."

With which, and no by your leave, he slammed the door in my face, shot the bolts again, turned the great key twice, and sniggered with his equals six inches from my nose.

There was naught to be done there; that explained itself; yet must something be done, if Stella and the baby were to have a house over them.

"See if he be gone," says Red-Head, within. "Thou, Jacopo."

"Nay, not I."

"Go thyself," says a third; and while thus they disputed, I ran speedily down the path. My horse whinnied—I hoped they heard him—and sure I knew that there must come to their ears the storm of oaths, and the clatter of hoofs with which I rode away. Two bowshots down the road, though, I reined in, tied the animal anew to a tree where a hedge might shelter him somewhat; girded up my sword, and returned afoot.

The great front door was open now, and I saw one of the varlets standing in it, still with his pistolet, craning forth out of the candlelight into the darkness, to see his comrades, who were searching the garden.

"Nay, boots not; I heard him go," he called. "Come back, 'a God's name, for I freeze."

They obeyed.

"Well he came not an hour later," said one, chuckling; then the door closed, and once more I heard the bolts go home, the chains rattle, and the key turn.

With all haste, I passed the garden path again, turned to the right where it departed to girdle the house; stumbled over two marble benches and the rim of a fountain, and at last, in the place's very rear, perceived a lighted room on the second story—its windows were open, moreover, which was the more welcome since every opening near the ground was heavy-barred with iron. Indeed, Providence seemed to be on my side; for this upper floor had a balcony toward which, actually, a thick-set tree with low branches tended one solid bough.

With bitter deeds, as with bitter medicines, the way to savor least is to down them yarely—besides, I did not know but that those suspicious varlets might search the grounds again; when, being inexperienced with weapons, they would surely fire their accursed engines at me without an instant's stint.

So I felt my way to the tree, caught the branch last within my reach; pulled myself up, cursing inwardly at the awkwardness of my sword, and at the noise it made rubbing over the rough bark; ascended to the houseward bough, and began, sitting, to budge myself toward the balcony. This was well for two blades' lengths, perhaps; then there jutted forth from the two sides of the branch, twigs past which I could by no means get my legs. The only thing for it was to stand and walk along this double hand-breath of obscurity (it shook, to boot) as if I were on the ground; and 'twas well I rose.

For, rising carefully, mine eyes chanced to fall upon the lighted window, which hitherto they had not had leisure to examine beyond seeing it was lighted with candles in a great hanging bowl; and I perceived that a tall woman in a dress of white lace had risen from a divan and was about to close this entrance.

God knows how 'twas done—how it came to pass that my foot slipped not, and that I broke not my neck with a fall; but in my despair, I ran the remaining distance upon the branch; leaped from the springing end of it upon the balcony; landed in face of the lady as she closed one half of the lattice; and, before she had time to scream, had her mouth stopped with my hand, while with my heel I kicked the other side of the window shut.

"Madonna," says I, staring sternly into the great dark eyes which, between my thumb and forefinger, stared wildly up into mine, "make no noise, and all shall be well with thee. I am here on the business of the duke of Rometia, with a warrant to conduct thee this night to prison—"

She made a violent struggle in my arms.

"—unless thou shalt prefer thy freedom and a heavy benefit elsewhere in Italy. Scream, and 'tis prison—the Tower of San Marco."

I perceived that the great eyes were measuring me; trying to penetrate the expression behind my mask; we stood thus for some seconds, she gagged, I trembling violently in the legs, well assured that if she did scream, I should not leave that house alive.

Just as, under my hands, she moved her head in assent—I took it to mean that she would give no sign, but should have put another question to make sure—a knock fell on the door; instinctively, I gagged her tighter; the knock was repeated, louder this time; and upon the sound of it came the voice of that red-headed ruffian below.

"Madonna! Madonna Rosa!"

There was anxiety in his tone; I knew that if she replied not, the rascal would continue his calling, and at last open the door.

"Answer him!" I whispered fiercely; and drew my sword.

"Madonna! Madonna! Is all well?"

She stood for a moment recovering herself; and Red-Head, without, did audibly lay hands upon the door.

"Answer!" I commanded her.

"Is it thou, Jacopo?" came her voice at last, mighty full and sweet, though with a slight tremble in it.

I heard the varlet sigh relief.

"Aye, Madonna," he said. "I was afraid—There was a drunken gentleman with a mask came to the door a minute agone, and demanded to see your ladyship. I—I thought—"

"'Tis well," says Rosa Salviati. "Now go."

"Yes, Madonna."

We heard him depart, his feet clicking sometimes on the marble floor, sometimes not to be heard on a thick carpet; silence fell again; and I perceived that I was drenched with sweat; wiping which out of mine eyes by mopping my mask about, I regarded the lady before me; she in her turn regarded me with apprehension. I call her a lady, for certes she had the air of one; she was of my height, of a noble carriage and of feature peculiarly delicate; one would have thought her the virgin daughter of a prince.

"Madonna," says I, bowing, "I implore you, be seated and recover from this alarm. But that there was no other way—"

Now, suddenly she swayed; and, I well believe, only the support of my arm stayed her from falling; deathly pale she had become; led by me to a couch all covered with fine lace (her dress was of the same, most rich and costly, though her fingers bore no jewels)—she sank down, her eyes closed, meseemed in a swoon.

"Madonna—" says I, raging with impatience at my impotence to aid her, and with disgust at this treatment of a delicate creature.

Her eyelids fluttered; she moved one small, white hand; then, with an effort, raised herself.

"What is't?" she asked, her eyes pitiful in their helplessness.

Meseemed full early time to speak again of the dungeon or, worse, of the threat-offered bribe; but I had naught else to say; so, stuttering, I repeated what I had said before. My heart was full of pity.

"If thou attempt to take me from here," says she at last, "my fellows will cut thee to pieces."

"But the duke will know of it, and hang them, and imprison thee after all," says I boldly, well knowing that I lied; and I could see by her eyes that she knew it also.

"On the other hand," I hastened forward, "this same piece of parchment which would serve for thy committal, shall cause the duke's treasurer to pay thee twenty thousand crowns."

I saw her small white teeth set into her lower lip.

"Twenty—thousand—crowns?"

"Aye."

She strove again to penetrate my mask with her eyes.

"'Tis not much," says she. "The duke hath much to gain by my—complaisance."

She knew what was toward, then; and, perceiving that she was merchant enough to estimate its value, I spoke more harshly.

"He can gain it as well in the Tower of San Marco," says I, "and prison fare will not cost twenty thousand crowns for the time thou'd have to live."

She blanched and rose, her hand at her heart; to this day I know not whether at the thought of death in prison, or at the sound (which I had not heard) of the drawing of bolts at the door below. I believe it was this latter, for certes she knew well that her danger of seeing San Marco was small with that accursed body-guard to defend her and prevent her count; but be that as it may, there broke in suddenly upon us, the buzz of voices from the very corridor without, and I heard, hastening toward the door of the room where we stood, feet which by their clinking spurs were those of some new arrival.

"I take the money," gasps Rosa Salviati, snatching the parchment out of my hand, and turning deathly pale. "Begone—by the window!"

I was willing; for in a flash, it had come to me who this newcomer must be that was admitted so; the count himself, who could and doubtless would, hang me on the first tree in the garden. But to escape by the window—even to the balcony whence, in my desperation, I would have flung myself to the ground—was impossible. By most malign chance, my kicking-to of the second lattice had caught the latch thereof; and while I wrestled with it, the panting breath of Rosa in my ears, there passed the few seconds that might have saved me.

"*Buon sera, ma bella!*" cries a squeaking voice outside; and the next instant the door was flung wide to admit the most repulsive creature ever I laid my eyes upon; so hideous was he that even in that moment of terror, while I rushed upon him and, slamming the door with one hand, buffeted him into a corner with the other, I noted his points. He had red hair—like in color to that of the varlet below, but little of it; a twisted face like a rat's; a stature such as that at which proper men bear their shoulders; and bow-legs in vermilion silk.

As I bent over the fallen nobleman, and wrenched forth sword and dagger from his belt, his hands met mine, fighting feebly to retain his weapons; and the feel of them was cold-clammy like the belly of a snake.

"By the bowels of Job—" he screamed; at which I gagged him with my hands. He tried to bite me, but forthwith I wrenched his head over to me, buried his face in my doublet and, stopping his ears to boot, hissed to Rosa.

"He is not to know of that!"

The warrant for the twenty thousand crowns was already in her bosom; she shook her head at me and then, biting her lip, pointed to the window.

"Go—go!" she whispered passionately.

I dropped the count's head and stood up, undecided for a moment whether to leave her at the mercy of that animal's jealous rage—bravo, bully and blackguard as I was—and poor fool also, though at the time I knew it not. During which indecision, I saw Rosa's face change suddenly; she opened her mouth to cry aloud and then, from behind me, came a thunderclap of sound, while something smote me terribly on the point of the shoulder.

Thinking the count disarmed, I had turned my back upon him; he had whipped forth from some hiding-place a tiny pistolet scarce six inches long—it was smoking in his hand as I turned to him—and he had shot me. Worse, from below came a burst of alarmed shouts, and as the blood went rushing from my shoulder down my arm, the varlets came rushing from the hall-way, up the stairs.

"Help, help!" screamed the count, getting to his knees. "Jacopo! Maurizio! Help!"

It was Jacopo that hurled himself in through the door first—I ran him clean through the body, and with a shove of my foot sent him spinning off the blade to die atop of his master. How he did scream! I kicked the door to again, and almost lost my life standing close to it, in readiness for the next comer; who ungently fired his pistolet through the wood so that the ball touched my ear.

"Help, help!" The count bellowed ever,

rather breathless from his efforts to spurn the writhing Jacopo off him.

I picked up a small table and hurled it to the floor, simulating my fall before that bullet; the poor fools without cried triumph, rushed into the room again, and departed less by two dead men than they had come. From the corridor, however, came the noise of many more—fellows that had come as the count's escort, I doubted not, and experienced with arms.

They held back, though, to take counsel; and in this interval of peace, I made a new essay of the window. The catch was obstinate; I had just forced it loose with my sword-blade, which was thus caught and engaged, when the noble object in his corner raised a scream:

"Forward, dogs! He escapes!"

And two men in full armor—I, be it remembered, had none—clattered into the room with drawn swords.

"Stab him ere he get his blade loose!" yells the count. "Run him through!"

There is doubt but they would have had time to do it, while I disengaged my sword and turned to meet them, had not their way been barred, of a sudden, by Rosa Salviati, bearing a great pistolet that was still charged, having been dropped by one of the first-comers when I slew him before he could fire.

"Stand—" she shrieked; but the next word was lost in a deafening report; before which one of the men-at-arms staggered suddenly and raised his hands to his face; though no face now had he at all; no head neither. And to his fellows, standing in the doorway aghast; to the count, risen from his corner and standing stunned with amaze, this delicate lady addressed language that certes might have come bubbling from the mouth of a Fury.

"Thou hunchback, dog's son, thou heat-bred pestilence, thou!" she screamed at the noble. "Ah, thou parched emptiness, God blast thine eyes, thou'd keep me thy slave and lose me my fortune, crouch-shanks, thou abomination of desolation. Here's for thee!"

She hurled herself at a long hanging of velvet that covered one part of the wall, and tore it from its hooks, and threw it on the floor and stamped on it; then she threw over the lacy couch and kicked it; swept a jug of orange-water and some dozen Venetian glasses off a table, knocking the table over to boot; then came back and railed more in the count's face.

"Noble—thou! Denier-pincher! A better noble could I make out of—"

I perceived the man had become frightfully pale, and that he was moving his head strangely from side to side, while also his mouth champed slowly, as it were. Now, in the midst of Rosa's storming, he made a great effort and turned on his heel, stretching forth his arms to his fellows in the doorway. Certes it was for help he appealed to them; but not help of the kind Rosa Salviati conceived; she, thinking he was about to command them forward, twisted him about with tigress-paws on his shoulders, scratched his face from eyes to jawbone, and hurled him from her so violently that he fell on the floor.

"Rise and come near me again, and I'll stab thee, vermin!" cries Rosa hoarsely; but my lord did not rise. Nay, instead he drew his body together into a kind of knot, shut his eyes so that the very place of them seemed to be lost; champed with his jaws until the foam appeared at his lips, and in short became possessed of that very devil whereof Countess Anita had spoken to the duke before me, months ago.

A more fearsome sight saw I never; the very soldiers in the doorway, looking at their lord as he writhed about the floor groaning and frothing, crossed themselves and turned pale; I stood trembling; but Rosa Salviati, straightening herself, began to scream with laughter.

"His master hath come for him!" she shrieked, loud and shrill as if her own soul had been in torment. "Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha!"

She sank on the carpet, buried her face in her hands, and began to weep, laughing still; and I perceived the eyes of the men in the doorway seek mine in a species of terror. The which, doubt not, I shared; my stomach seemed to be quivering within me; but, reft of their leader, these fellows were in worse case than I, who had had no leader from the beginning; they were there to be comforted and commanded, and so I beckoned them forward.

One came stepping gingerly past his master.

"Is there an exorcist near by?" I asked. "Or a leech?"

"None nearer than the castle," stammers the man, and raised his eyes to my mask in such fashion that I saw he would fain take me with the possessed noble thither.

"Uncover, thou dog!" I therefore shouted in his face (for he still had his helmet on)—and put the point of my sword under its rim and flung the casque on the carpet, cutting his ear in so doing.

"My lord—" says the man, trembling.

"No more words!" I said sternly. "Take him and begone; counter me again, and I'll have thee stretch hemp, animal!"

Thus, for the first time, did I turn the weakness of the human mind to mine own advantage; these soldiers, knowing that nobles treated them ever thus, had no better sense than to think any one who treated them thus must be a noble.

"We did but obey orders," muttered the second of them, coming forward (and uncovering) to take the head of the demoniac while the other took the feet.

"Obey them now and it shall be well for you," I said grimly, well knowing at the same time, that heavy punishment would be their lot whenas the count awoke. "Wend you instanter to the castle and give him over to his priest and his physician. The powers of the air are abroad tonight; see this seller of his soul and this seller of her body else. Ride fast lest they overtake ye!"

The poor wretches had great envy to drop their burden and cross themselves again.

"Begone!" I cried to them. "Hence! With all speed!"

They stumbled down the marble stairs as if the devil in visible form were at their heels; and must have thrown the count anyhow across a horse's crupper, judging by the shortness of the time ere I heard them go clattering down the road; at which hearing, I heaved a mighty sigh, and felt myself go all weak in the knees. The passing of the danger was accountable for this; and then also the air of that room, heavy with perfumes when I had come first, now stank of burned powder and of blood—sickly, sickly. To the eye, too, the scene was hideous; the painted door all split through one panel; the rich carpet dabbled with blood; the hangings torn, the rich furniture splintered and overturned; half the candles in the great bowl guttered, and in the light of the few remaining, behold the virgin princess of an hour before staggering to her feet in the likeness of a slum virago. Her face was all red with her laughter, the paint that had covered it was streaked and smudged with her tears; the modest lace dress was half torn from her; and amid the tresses that, loosened, fell about her shoulders could be seen a great pad stolen from the tail of some horse. Most strange of all, her eyes, which now met mine, were no longer dove-like, but hard and brazen as—as a harlot's; and her gentle melodious voice, hoarse and loud as a marketwoman crying her wares.

"That was famous done!" she said, grinning at me. "O Jesu, 'twas worth more than the twenty thousand crowns to see him twisting himself about, and thou ordering his men to do this and that. Ha, ha! 'A was a mean rogue; treated me like a wife, almost—shut up here, spied on; the last Northerner for me, I warrant; tomorrow I'll start for Naples—"

She stared at me.

"Why not come with me?" she demanded. "We should make a famous pair—I with the silks, and thou behind 'em with the sword. Eh? Come, now!"

I made a gesture of disgust; verily, my stomach revolted at her.

"Ah, well, needest not be so proud; thou'st been bully enough tonight, for less pay."

It was true, and she saw she had hit me hard; for a minute we stood in silence, face to face; each loathing the other and I, in addition, loathing myself.

"Thy work's done, Messer Bravo," says she mockingly at last. "Begone, then."

It had been my thought to see her to some place of safety, rather than to leave her alone in that house; I mumbled something about it now, and she mocked me again.

"Go home rather to thy milk-and-water," says she hoarsely. "I can care for myself."

"Give you good night, then," says I.

"Ah, go show thy pretty manners to the devil," says the woman; "my good night will be after I've pouched the money."

So I rode home—

Sick in mind was I, for what reason I have shown; and sick in body also, wherefor I could not think of the cause until the wound in my shoulder stiffened in the night air and, while it ceased its slow bleeding, twisted my arm up until I had to change the bridle to the other hand. Now the dawn was threatening, and would be up before I gained the town; I must not go to my house therefore—Stella, seeing me wounded and in strange clothes, would rouse the district; better make for Sergeant Lucio's quarters in the Citadel. What was the password for the gate?

I remember neither reaching the city, nor riding through the streets to the hill whereon the fortress stood; only I have a picture of Lucio coming to his door, face all anxious and pink beard all awry from sleep.

"Did all go well?" were his first words; and I nodded, laughing weakly to think how ill they had gone for my soul while they ran excellently for the duke's politics.

My sergeant caught me as I fell off my horse; perceived I was wounded, cursed frightfully and bandaged me; then laid me in his own bed.

"Sleep," says he; whereat I laughed feebly again, meaning that, with my self-disgust to rankle, I would never sleep again.

However, sleep I did: from that very moment until long after dusk; when Lucio shook me awake.

'Francesco!" says he, taking to twisting my nose when other measures failed. "Francesco!"

"What?" says I, coming out of ten thousand fathoms of slumber with the mighty desire to sink again.

"Awake!" says Lucio. "And on the instant! The duke demands to see thee!"

TO BE CONTINUED

AFRICA

by Lewis J. Rendel

SOMEWHERE in the dog-watches the steamer altered her course, swinging toward the distant land. That brought the nor'east trade dead astern and instantly the tropics rose up and took us by the throats.

I woke to the almost forgotten feeling of sticky suffocation and drenching perspiration. It was that once-familiar phenomenon, "a two-pajama night," come again, meaning that one will sweat out at least that many suits of sleeping wear. Sanderson, the only other passenger, lay faintly snoring in the lower bunk—an unlovely sight. He is that type of Englishman whom nine-tenths of his countrymen would instantly spot as "a most frightful bounder." His especial form of bounding is a holier-than-thou conceit. The electric light revealed a cockroach scuttling across my sheets. I dropped it on Sanderson's chest. He believes in being kind to dumb beasts—and what is more speechless than a cockroach? His mouth was open and that roach seemed of an exploring nature. Slipping on dry pajamas and a cholera belt, I left them together and went on deck.

This is a five-thousand-ton tub of the old well-deck type. How, with her twelve-knot engines, she managed to escape the submarines is a wonder. But here she is, ferrying up and back from Rotterdam to the Congo, never seeing a port of that England whose flag she flies. The cabins are aft in a high poop, the engines and executive quarters amidships. At Las Palmas we took on a deck cargo of many thousand cases of coal oil in five-gallon cans. They fill both wells flush with the upper decks, so that the only way across is by a boardwalk, with a stretched rope for safety in a rolling sea.

One was grateful for that rope, prowling for'ard in the darkness. The stars and phosphorescence made a luminous sheen in which objects melted and formed again in strange shapes. There was a thick silence over the vessel. The rhythmic engines were like some unnoticed heart beating far down in the vessel's fabric. One so soon ceases to hear them—but how instantly one is aware of it when they stop, especially if that stoppage occurs out in some chartless stretch of blue water, days from port!

Out on the boat, on the focsle top, where donkey engines and anchor winches lie in wait for shins, there comes the sense of lifting and falling as the black sheerness cuts its way across the oily rollers. A faint hiss of foam down below; the red and green lights amidships are like satyr's eyes. On the faintly lighted bridge a single figure paces, stopping to knock a pipeful of sparks over the rail.

The sea has turned oddly sick, smooth as gently heaving glass, seeming to stick to the steamer's side as if mixed with gelatin. A perceptible smell comes up from it, like decaying vegetation. Dawn breaks in a fog of gray heat. Even the shower from the bosun's morning hose has no refreshment in it.

So that is Africa. A low line of greasy green, with a single hill rising far behind it in an almost perfect cone. As we draw in to shore, the green becomes thick trees, lashed and matted together by a growth of monstrous vines. On the gray-yellow beach these seemingly inert rollers break in sudden thunder. Not a sign of humanity or habitation. The land lies as it has always been, ever since it emerged from whatever crucible it was that created things.

They tell me that this is Grand Cess. Somehow that name, with its absolute unreason, seems to suit the place. It might just as well be that as anything else. There is an almost New England economy about these West African names. They make the same one do for so many places—as Grand Pram, Half Pram and finally Pram-Pram. So there is also a Half Cess, and farther on are Grand Popo and Little Popo as well.

There seems no more reason for stopping here than before any other dreary spot in the five-hundred-mile stretch of Liberian coast. The whistle bleats at the emptiness like a mournful cow; the bosun swings rope ladders over the side as if expecting sea creatures to emerge and swarm up them with flapping tails.

But by the time breakfast is finished the sea is populous. A fleet of tiny canoes, each manned by four or five amphibious, chocolate-colored beings. They pour up the ladders, shaking water from glistening skins, all chuckling a babel which can only be described as guttural sibilants. These are the Kroo-boys, the only real laboring class in all West Africa, taking deck passage for the Bight ports. Magnificently built fellows, compact bunches of muscle under red-brown skins, clad for the climate in half a yard of red cloth and usually a clay pipe behind an ear. They will hire out for a year's labor at rubber or palm oil stations, or in one of those ghostly mines down whose shafts the British public pours so much money and hope. Then they will return to their villages behind that shore line of "bush," buy a couple of wives and settle down to the life of a landed proprietor.

They scatter about the filled decks, unconcernedly frying themselves in the shadeless expanse of coal-oil cans. At night they stretch out on the same, their dark forms invisible, so that going for'ard becomes an adventure. One never knows at what instant one may step full on a bare, sleeping stomach, slippery with coconut oil.

The whistle moans farewell, the new passengers settle in piled heaps, like brown puppies. Young men, kicked out to make their way in the world, possessing nothing but the red and black rags about their loins. But their limbs are sleek with fatness and sea-salt, they chatter and grin in an unthinking joy of mere life.

The cockney steward leans on the rail and spits tobacco-stained contempt as he looks at them. He is a Limehouse rat, his skin scalded by disease. His lathy bones, beneath a dirty undershirt, seem to have been fed on swill. The third mate has said he has a boxful of "art photographs"—"Very fancy, the kind you get at the Red Front in Rotterdam." He stands there, a bitter foot-note to civilization's pæan of self-praise.

"Every time," the steward tells me, "I see those blighting savages, I thank Gawd I'm an Henglishman."

MONOTONY

By

Barry Scobee

MARCUSON became aware of forming drama as he waited for his supper in the hot and foody atmosphere of the railroad eating house, with the low southwestern sun pouring in through a window at his back. He could hear the hard and angry voice of a woman in the manager's tiny office in the corner and the arguing bass of a man in answer. And he could see the swarthy cook, neglecting his stove, lurking and listening just inside the kitchen doors, his hand groping out to fondle a cleaver stuck neatly in a meat block.

The waiter, a pale young fellow, stood hesitantly at the screen door, apparently hung between readiness to answer the cook's bell tap and serve the guest or to escape to the wide cinder platform, or to the scattered railway division village, or even to the open cattle country that lay on all sides. He had the cattle country look, had the waiter.

The situation made Marc think of something. He got up and strode to the door, bareheaded.

"Back in a minute," he said.

He stepped to his battered old car at the corner of the eating house, fished out a big black automatic pistol, and shoved it inside his trousers belt. He couldn't have said why. It was just a hunch. Maybe because the recent weeks alone on his two-by-four ranch had been monotonous and he longed to join in a little sprightly jamboree.

The cook was so preoccupied peeping through the double swinging doors that he did not notice Marc's return, nor the protruding gun-butt. No other customer had come in. It was not train time. It was the hour for the village to be at its private suppers.

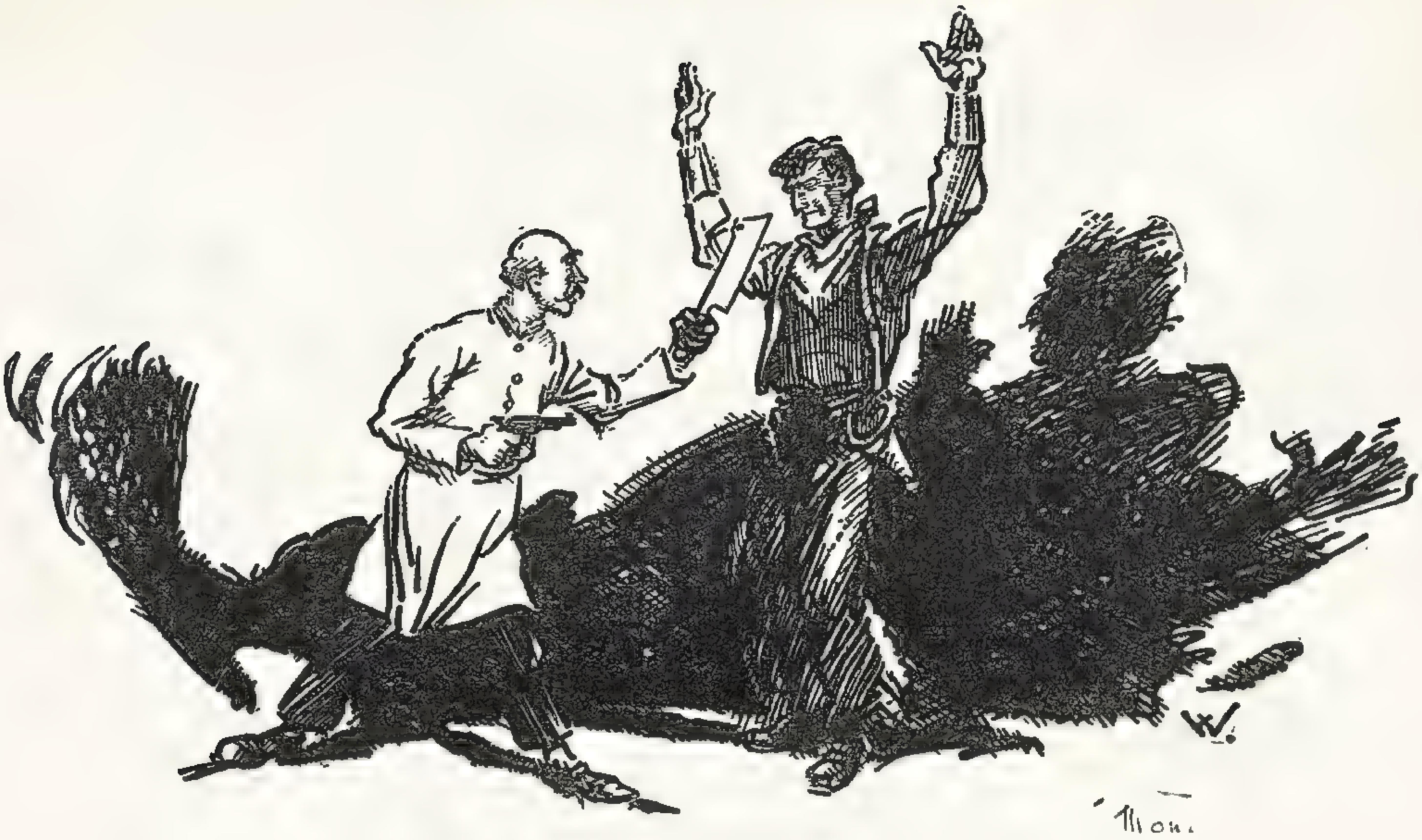
The cook grew more and more agitated. This was betrayed mostly by his restless, darting black eyes. Then abruptly he put action into the scene. He yanked the cleaver from the block, made the turn around the end of the counter without skidding, leaving the swinging doors fanning in his wake, and was at the manager's door, where he rattled with the cleaver, *clickety-clack-clickety-clack.*

"Come outa that!" he bellowed.

There was silence like the threat of doom, except for the popping of grease where Marc's steak was burning. Marc was twisted around on the pivoted seat, eyes glued to the door. Coming in from the loneliness of the ranch country, he was always tiptoe to see the girls that sometimes worked here at the lunch counter. The door opened a reluctant crack. With this invitation the cook kicked it farther, and thrusting his cleaver ahead of him, pushed with his bony shoulder against the panels, flinging the door wide.

"Come out!" he roared. "Step lively, you!"

A man and a woman came slowly out. The man was pointing a shiny little revolver at the cook about midships. He was



short and clean shaven and his head, almost bald, somehow suggested an egg in shape and hardness. His pin-stripe blue suit fitted like a glove. The woman wore the white apron of a waitress. Marc stared at her, swift thoughts, or mixed emotions, flooding him: Girl with a broad face—white teeth—troubled eyes—something about her—remarkable quality—dark girl—

"What do you want?" the manager asked the cook in a flat, scared voice, though he held the little revolver steady.

"You gotta leave my girl alone!" shrieked the cook, his fine roar degenerating and his muscles beginning to twitch from the excitement. "You gotta resign. Boss or no boss you can't—"

His muscular jerking made him garble his words in a chatter. His legs began a sort of breakdown dance of fury, his heels tapping the floor without control. Marc felt an instant's sympathy for the excitable fellow. But the woman scanned him up and down with a slow and withering glance, her mobile lips sneering. Marc liked that slowness. It spoke of strength.

"Crazy cooks and crooked managers!" she said in unbelievable scorn. "Kill each other and get off the earth."

"But I aim to marry you!" wailed the cook in protest, waving the flat blade in a fantastic design around the nose of the revolver. "He don't, this meddling pet of the management."

As abruptly as the swarthy man's jerking had begun it stopped, as if a new thought had gripped him, and he faced the woman and spoke calmly, though it was only the pause between the gale that had gone before and the cyclone that was about to hit.

"Will you wed me for time and eternity?" he asked. "Say yes or no."

The woman drew back. The swarthy man's eyes were flickering. She was in a tight place and knew it. The manager, still pointing his little gun, edged closer to them both, his face, like features painted on an egg, set thin and hard.

"Tell him no, Martha," he commanded through lips that barely moved.

"If she does," answered the man tensely, "I and she will entah the beyond on the same breath."

Martha shot an inquiring glance across at the waiter. He was still by the door on the scratch and ready to go at the pistol crack. Her glance shortened down to Marc, and as if in words she asked if he were a sure enough man.

Marc got to his feet. The two men, intent upon each other, gave him a lick from the tail of their eyes, and saw nothing but a mild cowboy. Marc had eyes only for the woman.

"These men, miss," he asked, a little quiver of gladness in his voice like a boy on vacation, "are they anything to you?"

"Yes," she answered. "Scum."

She was hard and merciless, but she appeared to sense that here was a friend ready to stand by, and she softened her manner.

"I'm getting out of here," she explained. "When my trick was up today I tried to draw my money from this—individual."

She nodded contemptuously at the manager, and at a murmur from him of "Now, Martha," what must have been her emotions pent up for a long time whipped out, her fiery eyes looking straight at Marc.

"I'm sick of—animals. And ham-and, and Irish stew, and crazy cooks. They get monotonous, I can tell you. I'm through with this hash-house life—after six years of it! I was going to hit out as soon as it was dark and walk straight across the range until the cattle gored me or I stepped over a cliff—or found a cave to live in, or a decent home."

"I've an old car out here," said Marc eagerly, "and nothing to do. Just came in from the ranch for a day or two to break the monotony by watching the trains go by. Could I carry you where you're going?"

"I don't know where I'm going—unless it's crazy!"

She gave a flick of hard and mirthless laughter—reckless scorn that was the sign of a woman gone hopeless.

"Going crazy is right!" she stormed on. "As crazy as the cooks I've worked with. But I'm clearing out. I'm quitting. Six years of it up and down the roads a-slingin' hash when what I wanted was a home. It's got old, believe me. What they call monotonous in the movies, with the emphasis on the first, second, third and last syllables if it's got that many. But I thought—"

She stopped, and her eyes opened on Marc pleadingly, her hands out, all forgetful of the two armed men—a pathetic, almost tragic, figure.

"I thought there ought to be some place out there for me—" she gestured to take in all the vast and empty land—"some niche to drop into and call home, if I went far enough."

"Aw, bunkus!" broke in the cook. "That's enough of that, Martha. You know the rules as well as me—you got no business holding extended conversations with the patrons this-away, perhaps to their annoyance an'—"

"Cook," put in the manager, "if you have got the rules down so pat—the order on the stove is burning."

"Go throw water on it," retorted the swarthy one.

The order vexed him; he fluttered, and all in a flash he slapped out flatsided with the cleaver and knocked the manager's pistol to the floor.

The manager exclaimed in pain, and jerked his hand back and wrapped the stunned fingers around with his other hand. The cook bent to snatch up the little revolver. Marc set his high-heeled riding boot on it.

"Take it off!" squealed the cook.

At the same time he bent, drew back the cleaver and started a swing at Marc's leg. But in the act his jerky eyes saw Marc drawing out the big black pistol from his trousers belt. The cook had not seen that before. Surprize and consternation swept over his greasy face, and he twisted his wrist so that the cleaver cut its arc short of Marc's shin. But the heavy blade sailed on and split off half of one of the little round pivoted seats. The part went whirling and teetering off across the floor.

"Now look at that!" cried the manager in exasperation. "That'll come out of your wages."

"You're speakin' about it soon after it happens," sneered the cook. "You egg-headed grab-all!"

He eyed the ruined seat ruefully, no doubt with a memory of other shortened wages, then his glance returned to the black automatic hanging languidly in Marc's right hand, and traveled up the arm and over the shoulder to the face, where it encountered a smile and a pair of slitted, cold eyes that made the cook start. Such a facial combination, along with a gun and cow country habiliments, had brought the cook bad luck in the past. He had an unguent for the blight, and he spread it—an ingratiating smile.

"Do you desiah yuh steak still, sir?" he asked.

"Why, yes, if it will stay so," answered Marc. "But it seems to be skippin' now, in there on the lids."

"Go on and dish up that steak," barked the manager, "before I chalk up sixty cents more against you for a burned sirloin. Waiter, shake a leg. Service!"

The cook was the only one to move. With a parting, sidelong glance at Marc's pistol he went to the kitchen, socked the cleaver into the block disgustedly, and coughed, for there was a fog of smoke by now from the meat. His white jacket disappeared between the swaying doors, in the blue haze around the range.

The cook apparently disposed of, the manager turned to other matters. He squatted down and reached for the little gun under Marc's boot.

"I'll take it now," he said sweetly, smiling firmly up at Marc.

"All right," said Marc, sweet also, but not moving his foot.

The manager waited, arm extended, fingers poised, but the boot stood fast.

"This gets monotonous," he grunted.

The girl flicked a jerk of laughter, but this time it carried mirth on its wings, and her somber eyes, looking straight at Marc's, lighted for a second with amusement and admiration.

"Are you ready to go?" Marc asked her. "My limmyzoon waits without."

Her earnest, eager inquiry brushed his whimsicality aside.

"You know of a place where I might find work—and decent people?"

"Yes."

She studied his face for long seconds, then—

"Wait a minute till I get my things."

She also disappeared into the smoke of the kitchen. Marc faintly heard a key at a lock —the girl entering her room, no doubt. He turned his attention to the manager, who had straightened up, uncertain what to do next. Marc bent and took up the little gun, and regarded it, holding it beside his heavy automatic.

"Pretty," he acknowledged at last. "What's it for?"

The manager sneered and reentered his office. Marc laid the guns on the counter side by side and within easy reach and waited for the girl—or the steak, if it should arrive first. His listening ears caught again the sound of a key in a lock, and quick steps, and he thought that Martha was returning. But it was the cook who emerged from the kitchen fog, kicking the doors wide. His eyes were sliding this way and that, like a man who has done some guilty thing; he had the cleaver gripped in his right hand, and a big platter held careeningly aloft on the tips of his fingers. By a nice piece of one-armed juggling he set the dish on the counter in front of Marc, at the same time slanting a look at the two guns.

"Why, that steak's burned to a crisp!" Marc protested.

"Listen," said the cook, leaning over Marc, "I and you have got to come to an understanding."

His eyes, red and watery now from the smoke, were blinking and boring, and in his voice was again the calm before the storm.

"Guests," he said, "complaining about grub has made me nearly as crazy as Martha. Please eat this and go. Don't interfere with what don't concern you. Or just go now. Will you? Answer yes or no."

Marc did not exactly weigh and measure his situation here, nor think of any cost. He only thought of a wide-faced girl standing there, with pretty teeth, and hands held out pleadingly, wanting to go, and of his lonely house under the monotonous sky, and the days he had lived there alone. And the die was cast.

"Answer yes or no," repeated the cook.

"No!" snarled Marc.

He and the cook reached for the guns together, but Marc got hold of his own and shoved the little one sliding down the counter out of reach. In the same breath he heard the startled call of a woman—Martha.

Marc snatched up his hat— How a man does that even in a pinch!—and eeled around the end of the counter, through the double doors into the kitchen fog. An object went past his head, and struck a wall somewhere, and dropped to the floor. The sound said it was the cleaver.

The western sun shone around the edges of a drawn window-shade like a halo, revealing a stairway door. Marc jerked at the knob but the door stayed shut. He ran to the farther wall, knelt, and groped for the cleaver. In a pair of seconds his fingers touched it, and in as short a time he was back at the door, jimmying with the broad blade. He heard scuffling, and dishes smashing to the floor, and the cook and the manager snarling like cats and dogs. The stairway door flew open, the cleaver went with it, and Marc rushed up the stairway.

A dozen narrow pine steps and he came out in a big low room under the roof. He caught a mixed glimpse of tumbled cots, a trunk, a suitcase or two, a coffee urn and a kitchen chair with a vest hanging from the back, but no girl. There was a window in each end of the room. No place to hide at all. The girl wasn't there. He started back downstairs, and was in time to see the door slammed shut with an impact that jarred the building and to hear a key turned in the lock.

He shook savagely but futilely at the knob. The racket of scuffling and snarling sounds broke out again. There came a little pop as if the manager's gun had been fired, and the cook cried out. The pop again, and the cook's grunt or gasp the second time. Then a savage cry and the sound of a falling body. And silence.

Marc sat down midway of the steps, listening. He heard tiptoe walking.

"Hi," he called, "open this door or I'll shoot the lock off!"

There was no response, only a creeping, crawling silence that grew heavier and heavier. Marc had the gun pointed to fire, but changed his mind. He told himself that he did not know where the heavy bullet would range to—in other words, didn't know where the woman was trapped and whether or not he might hit her.

It occurred to him presently that the man with the little gun might try a shot through the thin pine panels of the unpainted door.

"Fly-sized bullet might put an eye out or break a tooth off," he reflected, and he went easing upstairs.

He was curious to see what he could see from the windows. He tried the one that overlooked the railroad tracks. Only one human figure could be seen anywhere, and that was the pale waiter sitting on a push-truck by the corner of the station watching the eating house with round eyes.

The window was open. Marc waved and gestured until he caught the youth's attention, and then motioned with his forefinger for the waiter to come there. But the waiter got up and walked out of sight around the corner. Marc muttered in disgust at such a poltroon and headed back for the stairway, determined to go down.

To his surprize he found the door open an inch or two, as if in invitation. It made him wary. What was the trap? Blue smoke was drifting up. He sat down on the steps and peeped. Through the crack below the door he could see a soft leather house slipper. It moved a little. He craned still more and made out the frayed bottom of the cook's white duck trousers leg.

Marc inched backward up the steps. He tiptoed the length of the room to the open window. The pale youth was back at the truck again, and without taking a chance of scaring him away by crooking a forefinger, Marc cupped his hands and called just above a whisper:

"Come here, quick! Do something for me. Come on!"

"What?" The waiter's voice was round like his eyes.

"Szzzt! Not so loud. Come here."

The youth dragged his feet toward the restaurant, about half-way, a reluctant figure.

"Hey," Marc told him, "put the cushion outa my jit down here under this window. I wanta drop down."

The waiter edged nearer, looking up at Marc.

"Don't want to lose my job," he explained guardedly. "What they doing in there?"

"You know as much as I do. Listen, fellow, go put that back cushion down under the window. It's the thickest."

"See here," burst out the waiter in a splurge of confidence. "I ain't afraid. Don't want you to think that. But I don't want to do anything that will cost me my job. I'm a stranger in this country and far from home. I ain't afraid, but I ain't used to their ways, and I want to get my mitts on enough cash to get away on. You got no idear how monotonous it is here when you don't know nobody. Nothing anywhere but miles—" he waved an arm east, south and west, and added hastily—"or do you call 'em miles, just miles out here? You got no idear how mo—"

"Yes I have. Give us that back cushion, lad. Theh's a woman in distress maybe."

The boy sidled over and peered into the back of the car as if he expected a dog to jump out at him. He diffidently removed the back cushion, stirring up a mist of dust, and laid it under the window.

Marc backed over the sill, hung with his hands, and dropped. He landed on the cushion with his feet but sat down backward on the hard-tramped cinders, his peaked hat dropping off. He got up with some slight stress, not bothering with his hat.

"Don't get me fired," pleaded the waiter. "They're touchy in there. I only lack seven dollars to Chicago. You got no idear how time drags here and how flat the feed—"

Marc, having drawn out his gun, entered the restaurant, which was rank with the smell of burned meat. He cat-footed along the counter toward the swinging doors that were now as still as if they had never swung on their hinges. The place seemed to be deserted.

He reached the doors, shouldered against one cautiously, and peered through the crack he made, with gun ready for any emergency. The place was still smoky. He craned in farther, letting the door close silently behind him.

Marc could not have told how he knew danger was at his back—some sound, some movement, or glint of light. But he turned in time to see the cleaver in the cook's hand descending toward his head. He did not shoot. A bullet would not have stopped the cleaver anyhow. He acted by instinct, throwing up his hands to ward off the blow.

Marc blocked the cook's arm. But other things happened. His black gun was smashed out of his hand, and a corner of the cleaver cracked him on the forehead above the left eye, making him reel.

When Marc came up on his balance again the cook was dancing in front of him with the cleaver in one hand, Marc's gun in the other, and the little revolver in his teeth. After a moment he spat the gun out to crow.

"Hands up! I heard you coming all the time!"

Marc hastily raised his hands as high as his ears. He felt blood trickling across one eye and down his cheek and into his collar.

The cook gave the little gun a kick that scooted it over against the wall under the window by the stairway. He followed it and gave the window-shade a hitch. It shot to the top, letting in the low sun. By the flood of light, and with one eye, Marc saw the manager sitting on the floor with his back against a keg.

"He tripped and threw me," explained the manager aggrievedly.

"He shot at me twice," defended the cook. "These managers think they can do anything and get away with it."

"When he tripped me I dropped my gun in the dill pickle keg," said the manager bitterly, "or I wouldn't be in this ignominious position. He fished it out before I got over the blinks and won't let me up. I didn't shoot at him. I shot so the deputy sheriff would come."

"Shut up, egg-head," ordered the cook. "I or you—one has got to leave this place."

"You're it," spat the manager. "You'll leave it as far as the lockup. I'm going to have you pinched."

Before the discussion could go further there was a hammering on a door, and a woman's—Martha's voice called—

"Open this!"

Marc saw that there was a room built in one corner of the big kitchen, partly under the stairs. He had gone to the wrong door, there at first. He started to lower his arms to go to her help, but the cook thrust out with the gun and cleaver and Marc's hands went ear-high again.

"You there, cowboy?" came Martha's query from the other side of the door.

"Yessum, I'm here."

"Turn the key, can't you? The cook locked me in my room."

"In a minute," answered Marc.

"No you won't!" blared the man of pots and pans. "You gotta leave my girl alone."

Marc hardened. For the first time he felt wrath at the man. "My girl" rasped him. He dropped his arms defiantly.

"I'm going to swab this blood out of my eye," he declared, and pulled a black silk neckerchief from a hip pocket. "You watch your step."

"I'm going to get up too," the manager announced.

"Stay where you are!" barked the cook.

The manager got to his feet anyhow. The armed man made no further objection but he watched jumpy-eyed, ready with gun or cutlass. Marc swabbed blood, and the manager, encouraged by his success in defying the cook, shot shrewdly appraising glances at the man, then took a good look at a ground glass window close at hand.

"Cook," he remarked, apropos of nothing apparent, "if you'd shoot me they'd hang you. They been itching a long time in this town to string up a cook on a telephone pole. So you be careful with that gun."

Then he wrinkled his nose at the smoke. It was drifting out gradually at two small square windows over the range. But this didn't satisfy the manager.

"Let's open this window," he said, "and let the smoke out faster."

He gave the frame a lift and the window slid up to its limit. And before the other men were fully aware, so swift and unexpected was the action, the manager sat down on the sill, threw his feet out, and was gone. In a second the cook, keeping track of Marc with the tail of his wild eye, was at the window, shrilling like a woman:

"Come back here! I'll shoot!"

But the manager did not come back and the cook did not shoot. It occurred to Marc with a touch of admiration that the manager had appraised the cook expertly—had bluffed him out of shooting by the suggestion of a hanging. Marc saw the fleeing man dart out of sight around the corner of the adobe store structure and disappear into the main street. The cook turned back with a done look on his face.

"He won't bring the deputy sheriff," he said feebly.

"Won't he?" Marc scoffed. "That's what he's gone for. You better fork over my gun and beat it."

"He won't bring the deputy," the cook repeated, more strongly this time. "He's in bad himself, shooting at me twice and not paying Martha's honest wages."

But he looked from the window anxiously. His words did not convince himself. He sat down on the sill where he could watch out of the tail of his eye. Marc perceived that after all the cook was not the more dangerous of the two men. He was flighty and dangerous by spells. The manager was the forceful and resourceful one, and merciless. All at once Marc wished he had his business finished and was away.

"I'll open this door now and let the lady out," he suggested.

"No you won't!" snapped the watcher, then admonishingly: "Look-a here, cowboy, this ain't your butt-in. Why don't you go and mind your own business? You're in bad too, threatening to shoot locks off, and sneaking in here with a gun in your hands so I have to hit you to protect my interests. You ain't in no position to meet the deputy either."

"You sure got it all fixed up from your side, fellow."

Marc was alert for a chance to attack and get his gun. But the cook was alert, too, his movements as quick as those of some excited rodent.

"Look-a here, cowboy." Swarthy turned to appeal all at once. "You're just out on a lark, but me—this is a life-long matter with me, cowboy. I been shankin' up and down this world for thirty year as a grub dopester, and I'll tell you it's got monotonous. No home, no wife to save money for me, no wife to wash and patch, or read to me. I ain't never learned to read, and I lay lookin' at the print sometimes and a-wishin'. Boy, the monotony is something awful. It'd—it'd drive a man to drugs. It's drove me to pick me Martha for a woman."

"You'd better open this door," Marc warned. "The deputy will be here any minute. Give me my gun. You better not be caught red-handed this way."

"Aw, egg-head's not going to bring an officer," protested the cook without conviction. He twisted uneasily for a moment, then, "Maybe we had better let her out for some air."

Marc threw the key over before the cook could change his mind. He started to turn the knob, but the door was whisked aside and the woman stood there, eager, on the defensive too, expecting she knew not what. At sight of Marc's bloody cheek she cried out:

"What's happened? You're all blood!"

"Got nicked," acknowledged Marc. "It's about dry now."

They regarded each other, weighing, measuring. She was of the type of womanhood that does not have to go without its men except by choice. She was full-bodied, full-featured, with mobile lips. About her was something of the mother and the tender mistress and the strong Delilah, the sort of woman who might scorn men until she saw the right one, and the sort also that men, good, bad or indifferent, crave—and forget their God for. Yet about her was a contradiction of all this, a hopelessness as of a woman whipped by the world—as if perhaps she had been looking beyond her environment for her man and had failed to find him, and lost heart.

"You said you knew of a place," she reminded after a minute.

"Uh—oh, yes." Marc brought his wits back with an effort. "Yes—I'm afraid it will take some explaining. I—I have a little ranch out here—just a nest-egg of a place, and a handful of cows. Short rations maybe, and a shack to live in. I may go broke, or I may get rich, but I—I—"

"What are you driving at?" she asked, hard on guard, but waiting.

He went on, his voice thickening a little.

"I'll take you out there, if you'll go. To my shack, my ranch."

She winced. Her hands groped out to the door frame as if she were dizzy. Then she steadied, and her wide-eyed gaze went past Marc to some far horizon of her mind, held there unblinking. She was hard hit somehow and Marc wished to lay his hand on her shoulder and give comfort.

Her gaze came back to him again, and studied him, piercing through his eyes and down to his soul, looking as only a woman can look and bore and search. Nobody on earth could know what she saw there, what she found in morals and character and motives, what hints of strength and wisdom and tenderness, except by inference from her answer.

"You look like a good man," she said. "Will it mean home to me, this ranch of yours? Peace and quiet without the public smirking across a counter?" And she added wearily: "I'm ready to sacrifice for that."

"Yes," he answered, "a home for you."

"For how long?" Her voice caught.

"Why—" he was surprized. "As—as long as you wish it."

"I—" She cleared her throat— "I will go," she whispered, so low that he hardly heard.

Some articulate throat sound made them remember the cook. The man had a condemning and angry stare upon his swarthy countenance. He tried to speak but managed only the throaty discord again. He got up, and he pitched the cleaver to the block, making it stick neatly. He handed the black pistol to Marc. And he dusted his hands together in disgust, saying better than words that he was through forever with fickle woman. Then he stalked to the stairway and they heard his footsteps climbing upward.

"We're rid of him," Marc said to the girl. "We'd better be shoving on. The manager may come any minute with an officer and make trouble of some kind."

"My things," she said, and turned back into the room.

Marc carried out two battered, overstuffed suitcases for her. She called them "all of my worldly goods."

They went through the main room to the front door and on to the car. The pale waiter had put the cushion back on the seat and retreated to his lookout on the station platform. The sun was just at the horizon, laying long shadows across the tracks. Marc was in the act of lifting the suitcases into the car when he caught sight of the manager looking around the corner of the eating house with a considerable degree of caution.

"Where's the cook?" he asked guardedly.

"Quit us in disgust," said Marc, "and went upstairs like a gentleman."

The manager lifted his handkerchief and mopped his head and face in relief. He came toward them.

"I started for an officer," he said, "and changed my mind. Might have got us all pinched. And besides, I'd have been without a cook if they'd socked him in the lockup. Running joints short-handed is what's took the hair off my head. And I thought maybe you would leave peaceful— Eh?" He saw that Martha had her hat on. "Where—where you going?"

"We're going," Marc answered for her, "to the county seat to be married."

He saw Martha's start of surprize and the happy look that swept her face.

"Why—" she faltered, "why—"

"Unless you want to back out," said Marc. "I want to be fair—it will mean poverty, there on my little old ranch, and hard grubbing for years. You can back out now, before it's too late."

"Back out—no!" she cried.

And there was the lilt of music in her tone, an exultation, and a light over her as soft and grateful and tender all of a sudden as the red rays of the setting sun. And again she said with all the gladness that a woman might feel when a man plays the game fairly—

"No!"

A queer look was upon the manager. He swallowed hard.

"Wait a minute," he said, and he went hurrying into the eating house.

They heard him rush along to his office in the corner, and heard his heels pounding back again. He let the screen door slam behind him.

"Here," he said, cramming an envelope into Marc's hands, "here's the pay she has coming. I wasn't trying to hold it over her as a club and run any kind of a sandy. I—uh—hope you won't either of you make any complaint to the management about—uh—me. I—you've no idea what monotony will drive a man to in a little watertank town like this. I—wisha much joy."

With the best impersonal bow of a waiter, and a last hungry glance at Martha, he retreated into the restaurant.

Marc turned to Martha.

"Ready to go," he asked gently, "and put the crimp on this monotony stuff?"

"I'm ready," she answered simply.

They got into the car and headed away for the county seat without another word, in shy silence like strange children.

RETREAT

A war tale of a Cockney

by J. D. Newsom

IT WAS not quite light when Joe Povys, coming up the side road from Croissy, reached the Bapaume highway. At that hour—it was close on six—traffic along the highway was beginning to thin out, for the long, straight stretch of road was under observation from the German balloons and any sign of activity during the day might draw fire.

It was a warm day in March, with a threat of imminent rain in the soggy wind. The growing light disclosed wet brown fields, bare and empty, stretching away in loose folds toward the horizon. Down toward Croissy, in the hollow, there were horse lines, rows of artillery limbers and wagons and forage dumps piled as high as houses. Some distance away, on the far side of the Bapaume road, the camouflaged roofs of a rest-camp tried without success to blend with their dun-colored surroundings. Ahead, where the highway dipped into a shallow valley, a battery of eight-inch howitzers crouched beneath painted screens. The brown flank of the hill rising in front of the battery was pockmarked with shell-holes, all white from the upheaved chalky subsoil.

Old Joe Povys put down his pick and shovel by the side of a tree and hung his greatcoat on a rusty nail—his own private nail. He sniffed at the wind and stared up gloomily at the clouds.

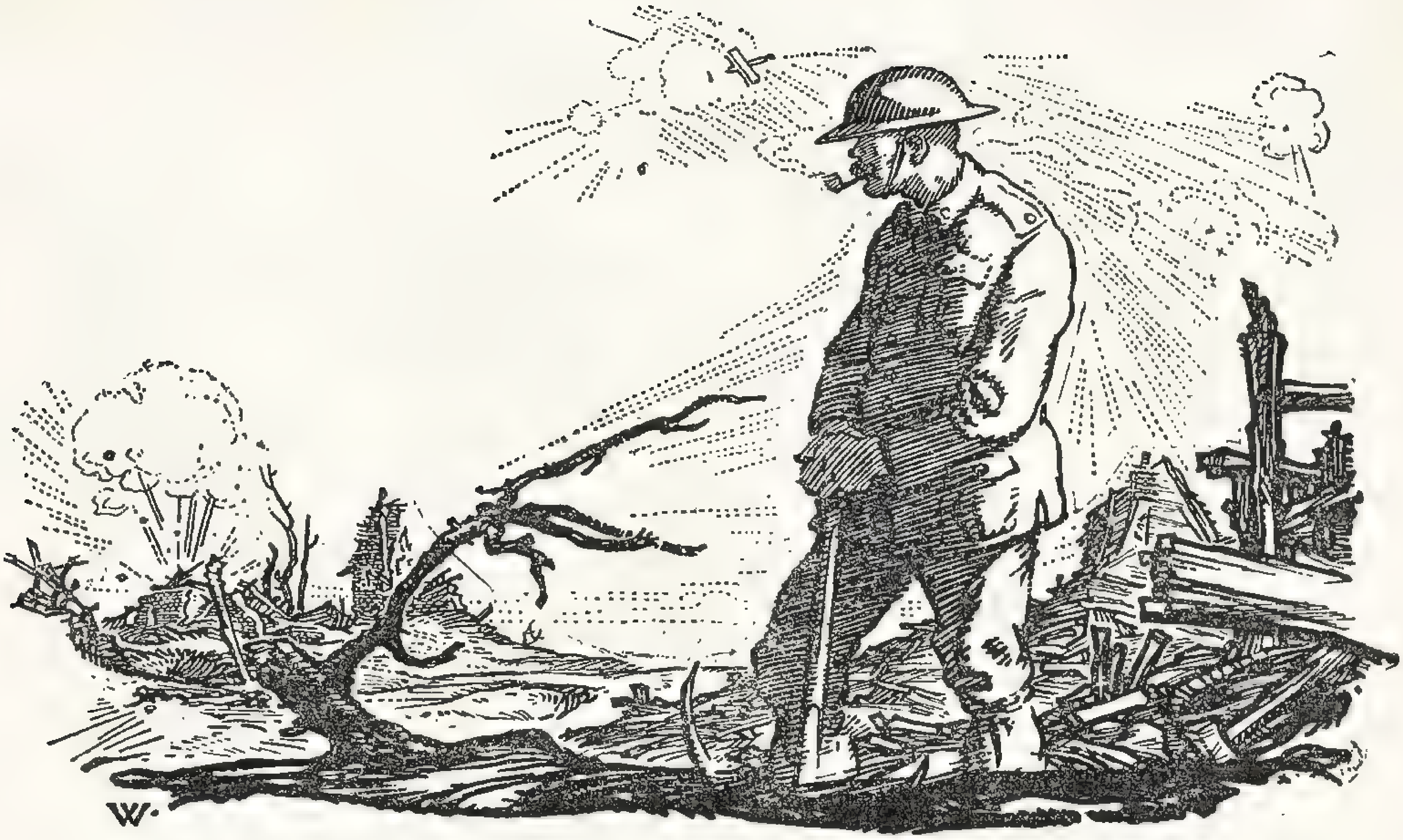
"Rain," he grumbled. "Drat it!"

The prospect of rain annoyed him, for he was in charge of the upkeep of the highway from the crossroads to Kilometer 45, and his tour of duty did not end until nightfall. The army made no concessions to the weather. Joe had to stay on duty even if it poured all day long, and nobody cared whether he caught his death of cold or was crippled with rheumatism. Such was the army. Everything about the army irritated old Joe Povys.

To him the war did not present a single redeeming feature: it meant discomfort, a cold barn to sleep in and bad beer. He was fifty-three. He had joined up under protest after his wife had nagged at him for more than two and a half years. She said she wanted at least *one* soldier in her family, and the idea preyed on her mind so much that she used to stand on the doorstep of her house in the Mile End Road and tell the whole of London what she thought of her man.

A pro-German, she called him, and a blinkin' 'Un, and a bloodsucker, because he was digging foundations for a new munition-plant at Endfield and drawing good money. She wept in her apron every night when he came home from work and fetched the beer jug. For obscure patriotic reasons she would not drink beer, preferring gin, which, she said, was 'onest Henglish spirits, Gord bless 'em!

Moreover, she was "ashimed to 'old 'er



'ead up," because they had a son, who had gone away to a place called the United States of America a couple of years before the war—and who had conveniently forgotten to come home to fight for the freedom of small nations. So the honor of the family had to be saved: old Joe saved it.

He enlisted in the Labor Corps. They issued him a pick and a shovel instead of a rifle, and sent him to France to mend roads and lay railroad ties. And a great peace came to the Mile End Road, where Mrs. Emily Povys spent her separation allowance at the Cross & Mitre, drinking good English gin.

OLD JOE shouldered his pick and shovel, and trudged down the road to inspect the overnight damage. Out of the heavy mustache, which completely covered his mouth, stuck a short clay pipe; his khaki trousers were tied beneath his knees with bits of string; the buttons of his tunic were tarnished. Six months in the army had not made a soldier of him. He was still a London navvy, on whose round head a steel helmet looked ludicrously out of place. He was short and heavy-shouldered, and he walked with the solemn, time-devouring pace of a pall-bearer at a state funeral.

As he reached the top of a slight rise the wind shifted slightly and brought to him a sudden gust of sound—a dull roar as if a thousand great hammers were pounding a thousand copper boilers. Along the eastern horizon lights flashed and throbbed, pale against the coming day. The sullen growl swelled, rolling across the bare hills in heavy gobs of sound. Barely visible above the sky-line, rockets bobbed, glowing balls of red and green.

The wind died down and the sound was shut off as if a door had closed against it. All night that dull hammering had gone on, and strange tales of impending battle had trickled back to Croissy—tales which failed to arouse old Joe's interest. The war bored him. Now day was dawning. The sky glowed and the heavy cloud banks turned gray. Again the heavy roar reached Joe Povys as he stood rooted in the center of the Bapaume road, and it seemed to impact against the pit of his stomach until he began to feel sick and hot.

"Blimey!" he exclaimed. "Proper doings they're 'aving up there. A proper fight an' all."

Then the eight-inch battery down in the valley came to life. Out of the bareness of the fields leaped long tongues of hot red flame. A deafening bellow struck Joe's ears, stunning him. The guns were firing at thirty-second intervals, and the blasts of sound blended into a long roll through which the scream of receding shells cut shrilly. Other batteries, hidden all about the empty plain, burst into action: hoarse-voiced nine-point-two howitzers, brassy six-inch high-velocity guns, and the sledge-hammer strokes of a twelve-inch railway-mounting gun on the siding outside Croissy.

"Blarsted crazy antics," Joe decided. "Murder, that's what it is. A-killing of pore Germans what ain't never done no more 'arm nor what our own boys 'ave done."

He had once seen a prison camp full of captives up at Arras, and he had felt very sorry for them—their plight reminded him so much of his own. With a twinge of sorrow he thought of his kitchen in the Mile End Road, and remembered vividly how he used to sit there in his stockinged feet, a mug of beer at his elbow after a hard day's work, reading the spicy bits out of the newspaper to his "old dutch."

A man on a motorcycle whizzed by, yelling incoherently and splashing him with mud.

"What's the use of mending roads for them lunatics?" Joe protested in his mustache. "They ain't got the sense they was born with, says I."

He trudged on, but before he reached Kilometer 44 another dispatch-rider shot by, shouting and waving his hand.

" 'As the 'ole blarsted army gone balmy?" pondered Joe, staring after the crouching figure. "What's the matter wiv 'em anyhow?"

Farther on he found a new shell-hole by the roadside, at the foot of a poplar, a nasty, deep hole which might easily wreck a truck rushing through the night. Joe could imagine that kind of an accident—the overturned truck, the driver mangled against the steering-wheel—for such things happened in peace times. But what actually happened in the trenches was beyond his imagination. He couldn't understand why intelligent men stood about in waterlogged trenches, trying to kill other intelligent men. It wasn't reasonable.

"What this 'ere world needs is a perliceman," he said aloud, addressing the shell crater. "Grown men making 'oles like this in a good road what cost good money to make! Blarsted craziness, that's what it is! And all I gets for filling these 'ere 'oles and working sixteen hours a day is a bob! A blooming shilling!"

Leisurely, while all about him the heavy batteries clanged and roared mightily, he took off his tunic, rolled up his sleeves, spat in his hands, and went to work. The war was none of his business; if the silly fools liked noise, let 'em have noise. He was paid to mend roads. If he did not mend them properly he ran the risk of being confronted with a bad-tempered individual, who called himself a captain and had to be addressed as "sir," although the whole company knew that his name was Archie Spinks, and that he was a building contractor out Clapham way. Captain indeed! Thieving contractor was nearer the mark.

Joe spat once more in the hole, for luck, and slowly shoveled dirt into it.

Then *it* came—rushing down with a rising shriek, straight at him. A huge, overwhelming shriek, a gigantic rush of sound, and a crash. Fifty yards away a column of black smoke shot up from the center of the roadway, and the air was filled with the angry whizz of stones and fragments of steel. Lopped off as if it had been a dry twig, a huge branch fell from a tree.

Old Joe picked himself out of the ditch and cursed until he stuttered. His feet and legs were thick with mud, and the brim of his steel helmet had hit him such a crack on the back of the neck that his head ached abominably.

"And another 'ole to fill," he complained bitterly to the world at large. "Wasting ammunition trying to 'it *me!*"

He scowled at the distant row of German balloons hanging against the clouds, and he shook his fist at them.

"Blarst your eyes!" he shouted. "You leave a pore man be!"

Instead of leaving him alone, however, the German gunners began to shell the road methodically, working up and down it, concentrating all at once on the crossroads, which they transformed into a swirling, crashing hell, and then shifting from point to point in giant strides. Shells hit the road, others struck the trees, others plowed up the wet fields. And the air was full of things that buzzed and cried and shrieked.

Joe retrieved his tunic, his pick and his shovel, and went away. No one could expect him to work in that cataclysm, not even old Spinks. He ran straight across the wet fields and threw himself down in the mud. It was his first experience of moderate shell-fire, and it was altogether too much for him. He cowered in the middle of the field, his face pressed down against the soft earth, waiting for the next, and then for the next shell to strike him in the small of the back.

It was the need for company, of some one with whom to share his misery, which at last drove him to his feet and forced him back toward the road.

Instinctively he cut across country toward the crossroads, heading for Croissy, where his company was billeted. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the battery of eight-inch howitzers was still vomiting fire, but now three guns only were in action, and all about them the earth was belching black-and-yellow pillars of smoke. From one of the gun-pits rolled thick clouds of smoke all shot with spurts of red flame. Across a ridge some distance away men were moving in small groups. Shells burst among them.

Joe came to the road and slid into the ditch. The German guns had shortened their range. They were hammering away at the ruins of an *estaminet* long since deserted. The wreckage was dissolving in a cloud of pink brick-dust and yellowish smoke.

Three flying leaps took Joe across the road. He hurled himself into the ditch on the opposite side. He was dimly aware of a broken motorcycle cocked half in and half out of a shell-hole, and when his sweat-blurred eyes grew clear again he saw a squirming thing—a man, all bloody and torn, lying on the grass.

Joe tried to drag the man down into the comparative safety of the ditch. The man howled with pain and begged in a dreadful choked voice to be allowed to die where he was. His stomach was ripped open and a glistening, reddish substance oozed between his fingers which were pressed against the wound.

Joe had seen road accidents and building-trade fatalities by the score in the course of his life, but always there had been some form of help immediately available. This business of dying messily all alone by the roadside, this dying without a friend or a wife or somebody to say a kind word, this dying in the midst of whistling shrieks and crashes like the mad laughter of drunken gods, all this appalled old Joe and made him furiously angry.

He forgot the danger. Kneeling beside the man, he said roughly:

"Orlright, me lad, we'll 'ave you in the amberlance in a couple of shakes, you mawk my words. Then 'orspital and a clean bed! They'll fix you up fair and proper like a —— duke."

Frightful and glazed the man's eyes rolled in his motionless head and focused on Joe's face.

"You—old—fool," he choked, tearing the words out of his throat one by one. "Fool—I'm—dead."

"No nimes," warned Joe, his mustache bristling. "I'll have you know you cawn't—"

"Germans coming," went on the rasping voice. "Broke through everywhere. Germans everywhere. Better go—"

"Ravings!" protested Joe. "Just you keep still and them Jerries won't 'arm you. I'm looking arter you from now on."

"Pouring through," whispered the man. "Better go—help stop 'em."

"Yus," sneered Joe. "Just catch me doing any crazy thing like that! This 'ere war's lasted long enough to suit me. Sooner it's over the sooner we can all go 'ome. It don't matter who wins in the long run, and if them Germans—"

The man's face was convulsed.

"Swine," he wheezed. "Coward—"

All at once he choked, writhed like a worm in the grass, and died, moaning terribly.

"Blimey!" exclaimed Joe, rising indignantly to his feet. "Called me a coward, 'e did. Me, what's only showing good common sense. To —— with this 'ere war."

He turned away angrily, for the man's face in repose reminded him of the face of that son of his who had gone away to America in the far-off days before the war.

JOE left the Bapaume highway and cut across a beet field, going toward the sunken road to Croissy, but he was careful to make a wide detour to avoid the shelled crossroads. Where the ground fell away he caught sight of the village with its deep belt of horse lines and wagon-parks, but all trace of orderly routine had vanished; the place was in swirling confusion. A bright fire burned in the center of the ruins. Against the sky shrapnel burst in green-black clusters.

The sunken road was packed tight with transport: wagons, artillery limbers, strings of frightened horses, ambulances, motor trucks, cook-carts spouting sparks, all wedged in between the high grassy banks.

Wounded men were streaming across country in small groups of two and three, going slowly over the slippery ground. They topped the sky-line by the edge of a small clump of trees and disappeared from view. Squalls of high explosive shells crashed among the trees, but the line of walking wounded followed the same path and vanished with seeming indifference into the smoke and the upheaved earth.

Joe shook his head. There was no sense in going on to Croissy. The best thing he could do was to cut across country toward Bapaume. Maybe he would meet some one who knew where his company was.

The welter of traffic was crawling slowly uphill toward the crossroads. A transport officer, bare-headed, a long streak of mud down his nose, went running along the top of the embankment.

"Hi, mister!" shouted Joe. "Mister, 'ave you seen the Fifth Labor Company, sir?"

"—— no!" snarled the officer.

"Well, you don't 'ave to be nawsty abaht it," persisted Joe, lumbering along beside the officer. "Which way do we go now, if I may awsk?"

"Got a pick? Get up to the crossroads and help clear away the mess. There's a wagon with a broken axle holding up the whole show."

"Yus! Catch me putting my 'ead into the lion's jawr!" indignantly retorted Joe, coming to a dead stop. "That there spot's been shelled something fierce all morning."

The officer wheeled upon Joe with crazy, blood-flecked eyes. He shouted behind clenched teeth.

"Get up there and work. You've got a pick. We're short of tools. The Boche is right behind the ridge. We've got to get this stuff moving, or they'll get it. Move, you ——, or I'll shoot!"

There was an ugly looking revolver in his hand. He seemed quite crazy and capable of firing it; everybody seemed crazy—furiously anxious to get away—everybody glared and shouted at Joe. Reluctantly, he moved, swearing in his mustache.

Not one, but three wagons were piled up at the crossroads, caught by the same shell and stacked up as if they were some child's broken toys. There were stiff-legged dead horses lying among the smashed wheels. A man was about to shoot a squirming brute which had lost its hind legs. Sweating soldiers in their shirt-sleeves were carrying corpses up on to the embankment.

"Heave that stuff aside—heave away!" yelled the officer. "Get ahold of it! Come on, all together!"

" 'Eave indeed!" grunted Joe, wielding his pick, which shook at the end of his trembling arms. "We'll all be dead next shell comes along."

But no shells came for quite a while. Straining, pushing, shoving, the working-party cleared half the roadway. Traffic began to move. Still the men worked, hauling the heap of wood and iron out of the way. The surface of the road was pitted with shell-holes, but the wagons jolted and bumped over them at break-neck speed.

Quicker and quicker the stream of traffic flowed out of the sunken road and went pelting down the highway toward Bapaume. Joe Povys wiped the back of his hand across his forehead.

"I'm orf," he told a youngster standing beside him. "This ain't no plice for a bloke to linger, not it! They shells this spot something frightful. I seen 'em doing it."

The transport officer, however, had other plans.

"Now you," he shouted, "shovel some rubble into those holes or we'll have more trouble. Put your back into it—work!"

So they threw dirt and stones and turf into the shell craters even while the wagons jounced and crashed into them, and the officer stood by, revolver in hand, and saw that his orders were carried out.

Joe was undercutting the bank with his pick when a battery of German field guns opened fire. There was a quick rush of sound and half a dozen sharp detonations high in the air. Shrapnel lashed the trees. The officer waved his revolver at the perspiring crew.

"Keep going, keep going!" he yelled. "That stuff's falling short and left. Nothing to bother about. They can't—"

The rising wail of shells and the quick patter of bullets cut him short.

One man, one of the working party, slumped down by the roadside, holding his head between his hands. He rocked from side to side for a few seconds and then fell over backward. There seemed to be a hole in the right side of his face—

"That's nothing!" shouted the officer. "They haven't found the right range. They—"

Shrapnel burst among the tree-tops with a clanging sound followed by the hail-like hiss of bullets. The lead-horse of a gun-team fell out of the traces, dragging the team to a halt. A great chorus of shouts arose.

"Cut him out! For God's sake, cut him out!"

Old Joe went on hacking at the embankment. By that time he had scooped out a good-sized hole, which meant just one thing to him—shelter.

Bullets lashed the roadway, again and again and again. "They" had found the range. Men and horses were struck down, and lay all tangled up among the wagons at the crossroads.

Joe crouched in his shallow hole and gnawed at his mustache. From under the brown belly of a fallen horse the transport officer's dead face was staring straight at him with eyes almost squeezed out of his head.

"Perishing murder!" sobbed Joe, afraid to look at the marble-round eyes. "Perishing awful murder. A nice plice this is for a man of my years to be in. Let anybody win this —— war! Let the Turks win for all I care, but get it over, O God, get it over! Let me get away from here!"

Sharp and clear, a new sound reached him, a sound he had never heard before, like a gigantic whip singing through the air. A battery of machine-guns had opened fire on the crossroads from the woods above Croissy, and the bullets filled the air with their thin wail. Joe stared open-mouthed as the bullets plunked into the sleek belly of the dead brown horse, passed on, and chipped splinters off the wreckage of the wagons. He seemed to be all alone with the dead at the crossroads.

He heard a faint voice shouting:

"They're over the hill! They're over the hill above Croissy!"

Machine-gun and rifle-fire swelled up to a prolonged roar punctuated by the shriek of shells.

Germans coming over the hill! On hands and knees, dragging his pick along behind him, Joe crawled away from the crossroads, keeping close to the embankment.

Out of the woods above Croissy men were trickling in small groups so small that they offered no target at all to the British guns. They ran like wolf-packs across the open. Machine-guns roared at them—they dispersed, reformed. More little groups sifted downhill, coming thicker than ever, sweeping around behind the wrecked village until they reached the fringe of the smoking ruins. The twang of hand-grenades cut viciously through the clatter of the machine-guns.

Joe saw the village wreathe itself in black and yellow plumes of smoke. What was the sense of heading that way? He'd cut straight across country to Amiens—walk straight on until he came to the sea and could find a boat to take him home. To —— with the war! If anybody tried to stop him he'd bash in their brains with his pick.

Teams cut lose from their limbers were galloping across the brown plow-land. Some one had spilled gasoline all over a hooded truck and set it on fire. A white-faced man paused long enough to shout down to Joe:

"Don't go that way! Clear out! That lorrie's full of shells. Ten lorrie-loads, one behind the other. For God's sake, run!"

Obediently, Joe scrambled up the slope and ran, without quite understanding why he should do so. Other men were running too. The broad curve of the field was dotted with men right up to the sky-line, all running away from something. A machine-gun was ripping broad lanes in their ranks.

A monstrous, bellowing explosion seemed to tear the earth open. It was followed by a hot blast which sent Joe flat on his face, slithering in the mud. After a while a truck-tire, smelling of scorched rubber, fell heavily close beside him, followed by a sudden downpour of strange, twisted things of steel, wood, and soft wet stuff that had been flesh and bone.

With a wrench Joe got to his feet and went on, leaning heavily on his pick. That pick gave him a sense of security, a feeling that something familiar still existed in this swirling nightmare.

Over the hilltop the land opened out. The houses of Bapaume loomed through the faint gas-haze; a railroad track flanked by drunken telegraph poles made a black gash across the fields; highways and lanes were dark with massed transport. Troops in artillery formation moved across country. Here and there shells burst, dotting the land with uncouth mushroom growths which came into being and dissolved as if by magic.

Bagpipes, far away, were shrilling "The Cock of the North." The wild lilt awoke slumbering devils in the London navvy's breast.

"Them blarsted 'Uns!" he growled.

He was half-minded to go back, find a rifle, and help stop the oncoming tide. The music died away.

"Aw, to —— wiv 'em!" he spat out angrily. "Let them generals and them colonels do the fighting instead of dashing abaht in great motor cars. Me, I'm through!"

He went on, fiercely determined to get away from it. From the noise and the stench and the faint, sweet smell of gas. He joined a leaderless group of men—transport drivers, miners, battalion clerks, wounded men. No one knew what had happened. The front had caved in; there seemed to be no more troops left to hold up the German advance. The important thing was to get away.

By the banks of a brook, beneath willow trees, shrapnel burst upon them. It flayed the ground in sharp gusts. A man pitched headlong into the stream, the toes of his boots clinging to a tuft of grass; another one crumpled in upon himself like a pricked bladder. The others ran, floundering along the bank. Bullets struck them down, smacking into flesh and bone with a sickening *thlock!*

The group broke up. Alone, Joe Povys floundered across the stream. Wet and dripping he tramped on. His teeth chattered. His brain seemed to boil inside his skull. He threw away his steel helmet and the warm wind streamed through his plastered gray hair.

Mile followed mile. At last he reached the outskirts of Bapaume: Broken houses, charred posts, black walls, ghostly streets where the *crump* of heavy shells echoed and vibrated. In the square by the gutted remains of the town-hall there were officers and military police, trying to sort out the mob.

The crowd scattered as a brigade of horse artillery cut diagonally across the square, going at a hand-canter, with a crackle of whips and a long-drawn roar of iron-rimmed wheels on cobbles. There was a weak burst of cheering.

"That's M Battery," a gaunt man beside Joe said with a touch of pride. "Cavalry division must be coming into action."

"Blimey, for all the good that'll do they might as well go 'ome," croaked Joe. "I want to get out of this mess quick, that's what. Seen anything of the Fifth Labor Company, matey?"

"They're going to form emergency companies here," grinned the man. "Better stick around a while."

A sergeant stalked through the crowd bawling:

"Any men who haven't got their iron rations, form up on the other side of the square by the town-hall."

Crump! A shell struck inside a house, and a wall fell outward in a rising cloud of reddish brick dust.

"Any men who haven't got their iron rations—"

Crump, crump, crump! Right in the square. Cobbles and chunks of steel plowed red furrows through the mob. Men lay in twisted clusters.

"Stretcher-bearers! Stretcher-bearers!"

"Steady there, steady!" shouted the sergeant, retracing his steps. "Now then: Any men who haven't got their iron rations . . ."

"Shut up, you ——!" some one shouted back indignantly from the crowd. "Get a stretcher instead of yodeling about rations!"

Joe worked his way out of the square, where every one was insane, and hobbled off down a street of cracked, blackened walls, where rusty signs still creaked above shapeless doorways. He got out of the town and into the country beyond.

There was no escape from the frantic nightmare. Darkness fell, all red and flashing, and rain drenched him. There were men, men, men everywhere. Some going up to the front, others drifting back. The earth shook beneath the slow-moving wheels of the traffic.

Joe fought for bread at the tail-board of a broken-down truck: Bread and a can of bully-beef. Crouching behind the wreckage of a cow-shed, he wolfed down his food, glaring savagely at all those who came his way. Twenty times he was stopped and given as many different orders—which he promptly forgot. He was through.

All day he tramped uphill, downhill, through fields, wallowing along country lanes all gluey with ankle-deep mud. The battle front was a crazy, jagged line. Along one hill-crest men fought viciously, down in the next hollow there was peace. Sometimes Joe found himself almost cut off; at other moments the fight was away behind him, and the sounds of battle dwindled to a faint, hardly noticeable throb.

Dead men, dead horses, smashed wheels, broken vehicles of all kinds, rifles and cartridge belts littered the ground. Sitting bolt upright in the fork of a tree, a dead artillery observer grinned down slack-jawed at old Joe. He seemed unable to get away from the —— war.

A battalion in column formation squelched by. Another followed. A stream of solemn faces. Joe watched them: Young fellows, they were, most of them, the collars of their tunic unhooked, steel helmets down over their eyes—grim, silent young men, going up there to die in the smoke. It made him feel old and frightened and useless.

"Blarsted young fools!" he told himself. "What's got into 'em, any'ow? What's the use of getting killed, that's what I'd like to know?"

And then he remembered the dispatch-rider, dying in the grass by the side of the Bapaume road.

"Called me a coward, 'e did," he grumbled. "Me—"

He leaned on his pick, thinking of his son, who was in America. *He* was the real coward. Why hadn't he come home and done the fighting, instead of letting his old man be nagged into enlisting at the age of fifty-three?

"If I 'ad 'im 'ere now," he swore savagely, "blimey! I'd break 'is neck for 'im. Me, being called a coward on 'is account! And 'im skulking over yonder in Ameriky. 'E's a blooming disgrice to the family and no mistike. Fair coining money, 'e must be, 'e was that crafty. And me drawing a bob a day, at my time of life! Well, if 'e won't fight, no more will I! 'Ere goes."

He limped on. To his left, Albert was smoking and rumbling in a yellow haze. No shelter there. His feet ached abominably so that he had to sit down and take off his shoes to rest them. There were blisters on his heels, big raw blisters full of water. When he tried to pull on his boots his swollen feet would not go in again.

Heavy shells trundled by overhead, going toward Albert. He could feel the shock of the explosions echoing inside of him.

An ambulance went by, rocking in the ruts of the narrow lane. Over the end of the stretchers projected clods of dirt with bits of grass stuck to them—boots.

"I got to get a lift in one of them there," decided Joe. "Blimey, I ain't going to walk all over Frawnce in my bare smackers. And now," he added with intense satisfaction, "nobody can call me a coward! Not wiv feet like mine!"

He waved and shouted at the driver of the next ambulance that went by, but it did not slacken speed. Mud splattered in his open mouth and on his cheeks. Before he had time to move a shell howled down at him. The force of the explosion bowled him heels over head like a shot rabbit, and the earth belched fragments of steel and dirt at him. Twenty yards away there was a hole big enough to bury two horses in.

Another ambulance rushed by. He watched it, while he rested on hands and knees, too weak to shout. It rocked on. He heard another shell coming and flattened himself out.

Crash! The ambulance lay on its side, its radiator buried in the soft earth. The canvas top had been ripped off and fluttered in the breeze. Some one screamed once.

Two more shells exploded in a field on the opposite side of the road, and something struck the bottom of the upturned ambulance with a crashing thud. The German guns seemed to be searching for a small white house set back among some trees. The next convey of shells reached the wood and pounded it steadily.

Joe found himself running in his bare feet toward the wrecked ambulance. The driver had lurched through the wind-screen and lay across the crumpled hood: he needed no help. Inside the car there was a tangle of legs, all thrown together in one corner. Joe pulled and hauled. He got one man out, a man with a bandage about his thigh, but his neck had been broken when the car went over. The next and the next—both were dead. But the last one lived. Both his arms were strapped across his chest, and the bandages were all stained red. The bright blood welled up through the lint, glistening and spreading in ever-widening circles.

He was limp and heavy as lead as Joe carried him away from the wreckage and settled him on a stretcher far away from the road, in the center of a weed-grown field. For a long while he lay motionless, his eyes wide open, staring up at the clouds. His breath made a little rattling sound at the back of his throat as he sucked it in.

"Feeling very bad?" inquired Joe, bothered by the man's fixed stare.

"All shot," the man answered in a terrible voice that bubbled up through the rattle in his throat. "Leaking like ——."

"Maybe the next ambulance—"

"Tell it to Sweeny. I'm due for a harp and all the fixin's." His face twisted up into a most frightful grin. Freckles stood out brown against his gray skin. "Say, old-timer, that was one peach of a dog fight! Up behind the old loco: Chinks, and a couple of guys in kilts, getting their knees cut on the wire, and a gang of wild men from Yorkshire, and us! Baby doll!" He moved uneasily. "Oh, ——, I can't see straight! My eyes are full of black specks. Come closer."

He choked and bubbles of pink foam rolled out of his mouth. Joe smudged the froth away with the ball of his thumb. On the collar of the man's tunic were the letters "U. S. A." and a badge shaped something like a tower—

U. S. A. Why, that meant United States of America! The words hammered in old Joe's brain: U. S. A., U. S. A. The first Yank he'd come across in France. This boy was dying. He remembered with a tightening of the throat that Bill, his own son, used to have the same kind of freckles on his cheeks after the hop-picking season. It occurred to him that he was mightily glad Bill was well out of this horror.

"Now don't you talk too much," he ordered. "Sive yer strength."

"There's nothing to save," croaked the man. "I got mine good and plenty. Hand grenade right bang at my feet. Bill got the —— who threw it. He's a good guy is Bill Povys."

Old Joe's heart began to hammer so hard in his chest that he thought it was going to burst.

"What's that nime?" he clamored. "Say it again!"

"He dropped that Heinie and the next couple. You should have seen our Bill. Regular bear-cat. Dragged me back behind the loco—"

"What's that nime?" shouted Joe.

"Huh? Say, you don't have to yell."

Breathing took up his whole attention for some time, and old Joe thought he was going to die. Close to the overturned ambulance a shell exploded, and splinters went sailing by with a *wheee!* Joe did not even notice them.

"I said, what was that nime?" he repeated.

"Name, eh? Guy by the name of Povys. Bill to the *demo'selles.*"

He choked again, and afterward his voice was a rasping whisper. The white bandages about his arms and chest were all red now, and little drops dripped into the weeds by the stretcher.

"My head's all queer inside," he mumbled. "Say, I could do with a drink. Got a drink? Any *vin rouge?* No, don't go away; stick around a while longer. It don't matter. I'll croak any time now."

Joe Povys was down on his knees, gripping the handles of the stretcher in both hands.

"Listen ter me, will yer?" he begged desperately. "Listen, for God's sake, listen! Who was this 'ere bloke—this Bill Povys? For God's sake, mister, I got a son by that name. A son what went off to Ameriky afore the war started. What was 'e like, this Bill Povys?"

The boy's head rolled loosely on his shoulders.

"Gwan!" his faint voice was sarcastic. "You don't say. Bill's old man. What d'you know about that! Wait a minute—Bill used to talk about a place called—called—"

"Mile End?" prompted Joe.

"Maybe, I don't know. Gee, my chest's all hollow. What's wrong with me anyway? I—"

The pink foam in the corner of his mouth had changed to a thin red streak, which ran down onto his cheek.

"It must be my Bill," shouted old Joe. "'Tain't a common nime—Povys. If 'e ever mentioned Mile End, that settles it! Where's 'e at now? 'Ow do I get there?"

"Bill? Ribemont. Railway line near some trees—engine's lying across the track."

His voice was so faint that Joe had to put his ear close to the discolored lips.

"Ribemont," repeated Joe. "Ribemont." He remembered seeing a sign-post somewhere on the Albert road with that name on it.

"By the loco. My throat's full—full of—"

He stared at Joe with a look of intense surprize in his eyes. He was still staring when a little later his lower jaw sagged down on his chest. Joe covered the eyes with an old khaki handkerchief—

Then he yanked off the man's boots and

tried them on. They were larger than his own and did not cramp his swollen feet. He laced them up with shaking fingers.

HE STARTED off at a shambling run, going back toward the smoke-rimmed battlefront. Off to his right he suddenly spied a ground of men; the usual clot of leaderless men, drifting about the countryside in search of lost brigades and batteries that no longer existed.

The sight of them made Joe's blood boil. His own boy was up there, fighting like a bear-cat—whatever a bear-cat might be—and here were healthy young fellows who were running away! He bore down upon them. As soon as they came within earshot he started bellowing at the top of his lungs.

"Whatcher going back for? Where yer going? A nice thing for men like you to be doing! Blimey! Running away! Get back there, you lousy scuts! There's enough rifles lying abaht—pick 'em up. Come on, I'll show you the way!"

"Aw, we're drivers from the 277th Battery," a bow-legged man protested. "We was told to go back to—"

"Told to go back!" raved old Joe. "Yus, them Jerries told you to go back, that's more like it. By the living 'Arry, the first man what tries to pass me gets this 'ere pick through 'is blinkin' 'ead!"

For a space it takes to draw a deep breath and to let it out again the men's decision hung in the balance, and old Joe talked at them of such homely virtues as courage and honor and patriotism, winding up with a solemn promise to kick each man individually in the seat of his pants if he showed any signs of wavering.

They were a weary, starved crew. For three days they had been under merciless fire. Ahead lay Amiens, where there must surely be food, shelter and some one to think for them. But, blocking their way, was this private of the Labor Corps, filthily dirty, his uniform in rags, bare-headed, and rather foolish.

His blazing, red-rimmed eyes and his harsh voice carried the day.

"Right you are, General," one man laughed. "Blowed if I ain't with you!"

"If you wasn't wiv me you'd be dead," declared Joe. "Nah then, me lads, this ain't no time to waste in arguing. March!"

With his pick over his shoulder he led his ragged troop toward the Albert road. He had forgotten the ache in his feet and he marched with his head thrown back, his chest thrust forward. Before long he rounded up more men, lashing them with his tongue, cursing their cowardice. Finally each one of his followers became a recruiting agent, and by the time the highway was reached he had almost a hundred men at his heels.

"Halt!" shouted a mounted military policeman, stationed on the Albert road. "What's this?"

"Get aht of our way, blarst you!" bellowed Joe. "We're orf to tike tea wiv the Germans, if you must know. Get out of my way, you —— perliceman!"

Discipline, the old army discipline was gone. In its place the men seemed to be infected by a ribald exaltation, which sent them up the road, singing.

"Hello, hello, and who's your lady friend," shouted the drivers, and the signalers and the cripples and the crocks. "Who's the girl I saw you with larst night? Hello, hello—"

They swung past the military policeman with fingers waggling at their noses, marching in orderly fashion, four abreast, and some limped while others hobbled, but they stayed in their places and sang.

"Hello, hello, and who's your lady friend?"

"Come on, young feller!" a gray old miner shouted at the policeman. "Get off that 'igh 'orse and join the army!"

Roars of laughter greeted this sally. Joe kept straight on, never once turning his head. His jaws were clamped tight together and his face was set like a rock.

"Ya!" jeered the marching men. "Join the rag-time army! This way to the cre-ma-to-ri-um!"

The policeman slid off his horse, tethered it by the side of the road, and ran forward beside old Joe.

"I'll get courtmartialed for this," he panted, "but I'm going with you."

"And nobody won't stop you while I'm about," Joe assured him grandly. "Which way's Ribemont?"

"Ribemont—about three miles up the road and off to the right."

"Good. That's where we're going."

The policeman whistled.

"There's lots of fighting closer than that. Over there toward Baizieux, the Australians—"

"To —— wiv the Anzacs!" shouted Joe. "We're going to Ribemont. This is *my* outfit. My son's at Ribemont."

"A sort of a private war," suggested the astonished policeman.

"Yus. You're a perliceman, ain't you? Well, round up more blokes as we go along. We're in a 'urry, and we needs lots of men."

Shells burst close by, hunting for batteries hiding in the fields. The column marched on, headed by the squat old man with a pick over his shoulder. Between his teeth he whistled "Tipperary."

Over a rise they came full into the battle zone. Off to the right where a thick clump of trees marked the crest of a hill, there was a swirl of smoke and the red flash of explosions.

"Ribemont. We turn off here," called out the policeman. "They're being chewed to bloody bits."

"Good," purred Joe. "Then my boy's still up yonder."

They were well beyond the artillery positions now. A company of infantry lay in reserve behind the smoldering wreckage of some farm buildings. In a ditch between two fields a machine-gun was in action, hammering away at an invisible target, and a swaying fight was going on all around a couple of lopsided hayricks. There was a steady whine of bullets close overhead.

Out of the farmyard a lieutenant came running with the usual question on his lips.

"Where are you going?"

"Ribemont," answered Joe, never stopping or slackening his pace.

"Who's in charge?"

"*Hi* am, go'blimey!

"All your officers gone already?" exclaimed the lieutenant, mistaking Joe for some venerable sergeant-major. "Are you the first wave?"

Shrapnel burst above the farm. There was a swift sleet of lead. Joe half turned and waved his arm.

"Steady, me lads, we're nearly there now!"

The lieutenant had run back into the farm and was blowing long blasts on his whistle. The small column tramped on. Shrapnel burst above it and dropped a dozen men.

"Let 'em lie," bellowed Joe. "Keep moving!"

The land was pockmarked with shell-holes, and all the holes seemed to be alive with men—brown, steel helmets blending with the brown, wet earth. On all sides rifles were banging and the air was torn with the screaming flight of shells.

By the side of the lane ran a thick holly-hedge. Crouching behind this cover, Joe broke into a slow trot. His ragged crew lumbered along behind him. There was no more singing.

Joe pressed on. Straight ahead now he could see the twisted, battered remains of a railway line, and by the fringe of a little wood there was a black bulky thing that might be an engine. The wood smoked as if it were on fire, and the earth all about leaped and fell and leaped up again like some hellish fountain.

The hedge ended abruptly. The road was so pockmarked and torn and smashed that it ceased to exist. It vanished in a series of craters so close together that there was no firm foothold anywhere.

Joe slipped and crawled from hole to hole.

"Come on," he croaked to no one in particular. "Blarst your eyes, come on! There's Ribemont."

He had splendid visions of his son at bay behind the overturned engine, holding off the entire Germany army. Glancing back he saw that he was followed not by fifty nor a hundred men, but by thousands, and the pockmarked land was alive with advancing troops. He seemed to be dragging a great, compact force at his heels.

He had let loose the great counter-attack three hours before it was officially due.

Out of a hole arose a man in a coal-scuttle helmet, who leveled a rifle at Joe and fired. The bullet blew past Joe's face. He brought down his pick with the whole weight of his broad shoulders behind it. Half a dozen men slid into the hole while he was trying to work his weapon out of the dead man's neck.

"What's the objective?" they panted. "Where we going?"

"Ribemont," answered Joe. "Up there by that loco."

"Where them Yanks are, eh? They been cut off all day," said a corporal. "Who the —— started this counter-attack anyway? It wasn't due for a long time yet. The guns—"

Joe was crawling out of the hole again on his hands and knees. Bullets drummed into the ground all about him as the men in the shell-hole dragged him back in again.

"There's a machine-gun somewhere out there by the railway track," explained the corporal. "It's full of machine-guns."

"What of it?" yelled Joe. "You let me be, you young fellers. We got to go on!"

He slid from crater to crater, waiting each time for a lull in the firing. Several other men were trying to reach the machine-gun also. It clattered in quick bursts of fire, but Joe worked along until he was almost behind it. Then he jumped up and ran straight at it.

The air hissed about him. Something stung his thigh. Three men were working the gun. They looked up at him out of dirty, bearded faces. His pick flashed down. The gun ceased fire. One of the gunners was struggling with the flap of his pistol-holster. With long arms Joe reached down and picked up the hot machine-gun in both hands and dashed it down on the survivors.

"Blarst 'em!" he bellowed savagely.

Again there was a swarming of men, running and leaping over the broken land.

Shells were bursting in a wall of smoke and dirt. Joe plunged into a chaos more stupendous than anything he had yet experienced. A pall of smoke hung over the fields and through the haze great shells burst, drenching the land with steel. Like ghosts, men wandered through the wailing twilight, where they stumbled upon other men and died, body to body, snarling.

Dazed and numb Joe crawled on. His aching body was almost played out. Ahead, suddenly, so close that he could almost touch its bright wheels, lay the locomotive. The earth was carpeted with bodies, even the holes were choked with them. The first waves of the counter-attack had gone by long ago. A group of grimy soldiers arose and cheered. Joe's ears buzzed, his eyes were blurring.

"The Yanks," he heard some one cry. "Well done, the Yanks!"

A stream of men with steel-tipped rifles went jogging by. Nobody noticed old Joe lying on the ground. With a desperate effort he squirmed along, closer to the locomotive.

A dancing face bent over him.

"Where's Bill Povys," he croaked. "Is he alive—Bill Povys?"

"Povys!" exclaimed the face. "——! You bet your boots he's alive. Hi, Bill, caller for you."

The center of the great turmoil was drifting away. The barrage was marching across the land, past the fringe of the wood, in among the first houses of Ribemont.

Joe fought to clear his brain of a thickening fog. He told himself that Bill would be with him in a second.

Then another face swam into his line of vision. It was a long, gaunt face all streaked with mud. Blue eyes looked down at him and a wide gash of a mouth opened and said:

"Well, sir, here's Bill Povys."

Old Joe sat bolt upright.

"Blarst it," he snarled. "This ain't no time to be fooling with me, I tell yer. I want Bill Povys!"

"Heck! Ain't I telling you? I am Bill Povys," protested the soldier. "I'm your party all right."

"Oh, blarst it," groaned old Joe, falling back heavily, "and I thought as 'ow you was my son. And 'ere I come all this blinking way when I might 'ave been out of it all!"

The earth was rocking beneath him, and the clouds wheeled round and round in the sky. His mouth seemed to be full of fluffy lint.

"Cut the old fellow's pants," he heard some one say. "He's bleeding like a stuck pig."

He dropped into a crashing darkness.

JOE sat in the kitchen of his home in the Mile End Road. He wore a brand new uniform and upon his chest hung a medal. From time to time he raised a mug of beer to his lips and carefully sucked the foam off his mustache. He held a newspaper in his hands, but he was not reading it.

On the other side of the table, by the kitchen stove, sat Mrs. Emily Povys and her bosom friend, Mrs. Flora Loomis.

"'E did it all 'is own self, so the general said," explained Mrs. Povys, pouring water into the teapot. "One lump of saccharine or two, dearie? Ain't it orful stuff? And, dearie, 'e was that brave they say 'e was an example to the whole harmy!"

"Ain't 'e the true-blue 'ero?" tittered Mrs. Loomis, making eyes at Joe's bright medal.

"And that modest, bless 'is golden 'eart! 'E's got two weeks' furlong, and then 'e goes back to be an instructive corporal, dearie. 'E's done 'is bit noble, and 'e won't go overseas no more."

"I should 'ope not," purred Mrs. Loomis. "'E's a credick to the harmy, if you should awsk me."

"Yus, a credick. And, dearie, I 'ad a letter from my boy Bill only this morning. Bless 'is 'heart if 'e ain't building ships in America at a place called 'Og Island. Funny nime, ain't it? 'Og. And 'e sent me a postal order for five shillings, the dear boy did!"

"Well now," cooed Mrs. Loomis, "and 'e's doing 'is bit too, ain't 'e just. A family of 'eroes as you might properly say."

"Yus, dearie, I'm proud of my men. And Bill, 'e's riveting, which is awful dangerous work, because the 'eads fly off—"

"Blarst it!" suddenly burst out old Joe. "When are you women going to stop cackling? Blarst it! Me and my medals indeed! Bill and his—rivets! Bill! If ever I lay my 'ands on that perishing blighter's neck I'll wring it like a perishing chicken's. I'll teach 'im to make a fool out of me if ever 'e comes 'ome!"

He stamped out of the kitchen and slammed the door behind him.

"'E goes like that sometimes," admitted Mrs. Povys. "It's a touch of shell-shock, so they say."

ARMY FARE

by Leonard H. Nason

AN AMERICAN troop-train was halted at Chateauroux one afternoon to change engines, get travel orders, and kill a little time. The last car of the train was used as a ration car and was occupied by three sergeants, who were counting out loaves of bread and cans of hash in preparation for supper. The car was of the "forty men" type, and a French soldier who had been hovering in the vicinity appeared at the side door, his chin on level with the floor. This soldier rolled his eyes and smacked his lips as he regarded the great pile of white bread that filled one end of the car, the generous quantity of canned jam, and the fat, prosperous-looking cans of roast beef, of hash, of tomatoes, and of beans.

"What the —— is eatin' that guy?" asked one of the Americans in the car.

"He's after the chow," replied another, not looking up from the bread he was cutting with a bayonet. "Bat him over the head with your gun if he tries to get in." The third sergeant could speak French.

"*Qu'est ce que tu veux, tête de veau?*" said he.

"Ah," cried the French soldier, "myself and three comrades are back there in the train, returning to the front from the depot. Yesterday we left, and we were given but two small cans of conserve and a bit of sausage for the journey. The first day it was gone. For the rest, we must buy our food or go hungry. Alas! we are poor, and all the Americans are rich, rich, rich. Regard the beautiful white bread, ah! the heavenly white bread—like cake! Behold the most succulent *rosbif*, contemplate—"

"What the —— is all that about?" interrupted one of the sergeants.

"He craves a hand-out," replied the one who could speak French.

"Well, let's give the poor —— a piece of bread and jam."

"Naw, he says he's got some buddies back there. Open up a can of beans and give it to him."

"Share this with your comrades," directed the American soldier, handing out an open can, and the Frenchman departed smiling.

After a time, one of the sergeants went to the door and looked out. Suddenly his gaze became fixed. His eyes began to protrude and then an expression of horror gradually settled upon his face. The other two sergeants stepped quickly to his side, one of them catching down his pistol from where it hung upon a hook, for one never

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"Army Fare," copyright, 1926, by Leonard H. Nason.

knew what might happen, from a gang-fight with the frogs to a German prisoner riding the brake-rods. They beheld, however, the French soldier seated with his back against the car trucks, industriously shoveling the beans into his mouth with his hand. The beans were about half gone then, and the Americans watched fascinated, until the last of them had been searched from the can with a dirty finger and devoured. Then one of the sergeants was for descending and inflicting bodily chastisement.

"Let him alone," said the other two, "a guy that can eat a quart can of cold beans at one sitting oughta get a medal."

II

THE second or third day of the St. Mihiel drive my battery was pulled out of the line and we were started hiking to the Argonne. We had had a lot of work and not much food for the past week, and every one had a raging appetite. The machine-gun sergeant, two men who were learning to be observers, a man who had once been cook and was now a machine-gunner, and a man who had once been the gas N. C. O. but was now a liaison agent, had formed a gang, for the purpose of thieving, mutual protection from the police, etc. When I was with the battery I belonged to this gang.

While we were catching our breath, and waiting for darkness to begin the march, Shorty Delamar, the ex-cook, managed to steal some pancake flour from a divisional staff mess in the next woods. Oh boy! Shorty was robbing-dog or striking, for one of our lieutenants and had gone over to the division with his officer to hold his horse. When he came back he had the flour in his helmet. The gang rapidly retired into the depths of the woods—so that too many undesirables wouldn't gather to help us eat the pancakes—and proceeded to build a fire and make a batter. While Shorty was cooking the cakes in his mess-kit, the rest of us sat around and let the water run from our mouths, and our imaginations gloated over the pleasant thoughts of pancakes hot from the griddle. We handn't had any for a year.

While Shorty was cooking the last cake, and I was smacking my lips over a tiny piece of batter that had fallen on a stone by the fire and cooked there, we heard a heavy step approach. It was Shorty's officer.

"I've got to go ahead with the guides," explained the officer, "so saddle my horse for me right away, will you? I've been hunting you all over ——."

His eyes discovered the tiny pile of cakes —we only had flour enough for six—and his nose sniffed the air. "Why!" he exclaimed, "did you cook those pancakes for me, Delamar?"

At once every eye looked at Shorty, but he was found wanting. This bird with the boots was paying him sixty francs a month.

"Yes," said Shorty.

The officer swept up the cakes and went off stuffing them into his mouth. Shorty looked helplessly around the circle.

"Aw, have a heart!" he said pleadingly, but he was expelled from the gang right there.

III

THE gentle cootie is probably better known by reputation, at least to the world at large, than any other member of the A. E. F. and I expected to acquire them soon after I arrived in France. Luckily, I did not acquire any during the period of training, nor all the time that I was at the front. I slept on the ground, in French dugouts, German dugouts, in farmhouses, and in hay-lofts, and never a passenger did I pick up. Maybe this was because I kept myself well-greased with some kind of stuff that was supposed to be a preventative of mustard-gas burns; perhaps I was too tough a bird for the cooties to tackle.

When I was in a base hospital some time in November of 1918, I was seized one morning with a tremendous itching. After about half an hour's idle scratching, I investigated, and found numbers of red patches the size of my thumb nail, where some prowling cooties had taken their breakfast from my hide. Those cooties got in all the licks that they had missed on me during the preceding spring and summer.

I had a very large open wound and when they nibbled at the edges of it, I very nearly went through the roof. After about a day of providing hot meals for these undesirable guests, I registered a kick. Two husky orderlies gave me a kerosene bath, shaved me as bald as an onion, and changed the bed clothing. I haven't seen a cootie from that day to this.

Avicenna

Another of the
Goodly Company of Adventurers

By

Post Sargent

THIS is the tale of Sheik Abou Ali el-Hoséin Abd Allah Ibn Sina, whose many cognomens were curtailed by his contemporaries to make him quotable, as his name and fame grew on men's lips. Hence, Aven Sina—Englished to Avicenna—philosopher and adventurer.

For nine centuries he has remained, in both Orient and Occident, a dominant figure in the history of human thought. As the Latin poet Virgil acquired, in the popular tradition of medieval Europe, the reputation of magician and soothsayer, so Avicenna became in Oriental legend, especially in Turkish folklore, a fantastic figure, a kind of beneficent sorcerer, whom popular imagination has made the hero of countless adventures.

ALLAH knoweth the truth of this that I set down, which is written at greater length in my treatise on the art of medicine, and is confirmed by the pen of my disciple, el-Djouzdjani, who has thus undertaken to spare the modesty of his master. For though the world should cherish the records of its sages and truly great ones, it ill becomes such an one to trumpet his talents and titles to glory, unless his veracity be challenged by his foes.

Since such an enemy has risen up against me, and since I must soon die—being in the fifty-eighth year of my age and, truth to tell, ailing and worn out from much study and hardships and excesses of the body—I set down here most briefly a matter or two as under oath, to confound vilifiers and slanderers of my fame.

I was born in the month of Safar in the year 375,* whereafter my father moved to Bokhara, that the best masters might be had to train my mind.

By the age of ten, as all men know, I knew the Koran by heart and most of Arabic poetry, and was held to be a youthful prodigy by the people of the city. Before my sixteenth year my teachers had no more to teach me in logic, the science of Euclid or the theory of medicine.

Thus my mind turned back on philosophy, and the Greek, Aristotle, became my guide. Night and day I studied him without ceasing a moment, until all he wrote became my own and was graven on my mind.

And now, having reached the age of seventeen, my apprenticeship being served in the halls of learning, I set forth into the world to find a market for my accomplishments.

From the lips of my grandfather, who had it from his great-grandfather, through his father, I had learned in early youth of the wonders of the court and city of Bagdad. But thither I might not go to have advancement, for the great Haroun al Raschid was

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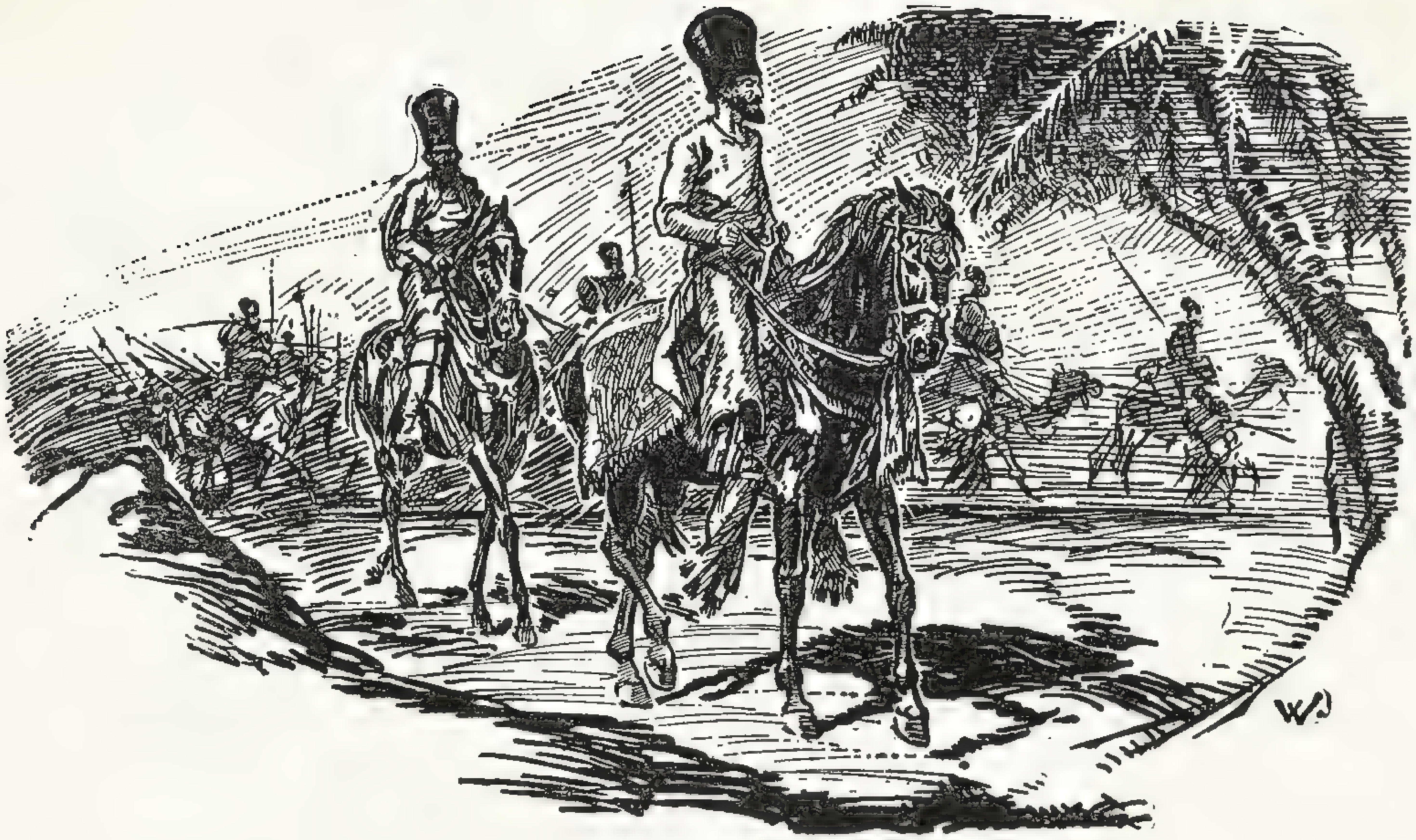
* The year 980 of the Christian era.



long since dead and Romance had died with him. Only the lees were left, it seemed to me, of the colorful, heady wine of life that our fathers had drunk.

To the city of Urdjensh in Khiva I went, where I found a patron for a time in the Vizier. Thence I wandered from hamlet to hamlet, through the districts of Nishapur and Merv, until I reached the frontiers of Khorasan. Somewhere, I felt, was a place where learning would be held in honor and my talents given a chance to shine.

But the times were troubled, as they had been, Allah knows, for several centuries gone, according to the chronicles I had found among the writings in the palace of Emir Nouh at Bokhara. Wild Persians, Turkomans, Mervi, Jews, Tadjiks, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Arabs intrigued or fought wherever I turned my steps. Brigandage, violence, extortion, death by poison or the scimitar, awaited the highest or humblest, in palace or hut, or by the roadside.

Yet I was not unhappy. I was young, my needs were few, my wealth was carried in my head. If, at times, a pillaging band of Kurds or Uzbeks descended upon the village where I slept of a night, my air of poverty made me unworthy of the attention of the marauders. Or else I slipped with my hosts into the darkness and lay concealed in the fields.

At other times I supped at the house of the head man of some village whose cheer I repaid by a disquisition on the ancient learning of Iran, or by reading from my memory a thousand verses of the poets of Persia or Arabia. Or with some caravan I rode the great trade routes that stretch to west and north; to the city of Stamboul and into Muscovy.

From Jorjan, close to the Caspian Sea, I went to Rai, near the great city of Teheran. There I settled down for a time and wrote some thirty treatises, my wisdom being by then ripened. Southward again to Kaswin and thence to Hamadan, where Shems Addaula was Emir.

In Hamadan my fame grew and my misfortunes began. And this is the manner of it.

From Bokhara to Urdjensh, in Nishapur and Merv and Khorasan, from hovel, caravanserai and camel station, the rumor ran before me to Hamadan that a *hakim* of prodigious learning, and magically skilled in the art of the physician, was healing the ailing and curing the dying who lay on the path of his journey. No *djinn*, but a pious Persian blessed by Allah, since he carried in his memory all the Koran, to the very last *sûra* given by Heaven to the Prophet.

As I abode in the house of a noble lady of Hamadan, since I was not ill-favored of face—though it was my book-mind of the Koran and the poets that won me her favor—a messenger came to me from Shems Addaula, the Emir. Shems Addaula lay dying and entreated me to use my utmost skill upon him, as I had done, according to common report, for scores of both great and lowly.*

The doors of Shems Addaula's palace flew open before me, and a hundred court officers and slaves stood prepared to do my bidding. Conducted to the Emir's bed where he lay pale and almost lifeless, I probed his ailment and found it not beyond my skill. I whispered in his ear *al-fâtiha*, the "opening one" of the *sûras* of the Koran, "in the name of Allah, the compassionate compassioner" and called upon my science—the science of Galen and Hippocrates, my masters. For forty days and nights—since great was my strength in my youth—I cared for him assiduously. And he came cured of his sickness.

Thus I, wandering *failasouf*,† a Sheik without tribe or following, became court physician and familiar of the Emir. And was named by him to be his Vizier.

But Shems Addaula carried war to a neighbor close by Kirmissin. Desiring above all things peace, leisure for reflection and study, and time to administer my office well; being, moreover, by nature rather a healer of men than a slayer, I counseled peace. But my counsel was passed over, since officers and soldiers of Shems Addaula were hot-brained and unruly, being mercenaries and greedy for pillage and the spoils of war.

Though a lover of peace, I was not a craven. And this I say for my vilifiers. Simitar in hand, with chirurgical tools and healing herbs and balsams laden upon a pack-mule, I led my troop to Kirmissin. We found a superior force of the enemy before their city. The fight was fierce and stubborn and we were beaten back with much loss of life. Sullen and grumbling, without their booty, our mixed band of Persians, Kurds and Uzbeks retreated to the gates of Hamadan.

Now I, the Vizier, being most blameless of those of Hamadan for the adverse fortunes of war, was held chiefly guilty by the rabble, since my words of peace were thought to have cast a spell upon their weapons and sapped their courage. But the Emir listened not to the complaints of his courtiers. And I, though second in authority in the state of Hamadan, stood not on dignity, but spent that day in binding wounds and succoring the dying, though black looks and muttered threats were my recompense.

Yet none dared stir a hand against me, since many lives depended upon my skill, and my learning was held to be black magic. But in the night a false courage came to them, born of strong liquors and the secret urgings of jealous courtiers. While I slept a small band crept into the palace. I was awakened by the light of torches on my face and the tug of rough hands on my body. I was bound and carried out from the palace and cast like a criminal into a filthy hut. A sentinel was placed before the door and the captains of the Emir's troops held council to decide my fate.

When the sun was up I was led before the Emir. Roped and bound, except for my feet, I stood before my master. Behind me came a riotous mob of soldiers and the rabble of the streets. Even the pariah dogs snapped at my heels. Ibn Sina, ech-Cheikh al-Rais, Sheik and philosopher, light and pride of learning of Bokhara, center of culture of Islam, was hazed like a thief before his executioner!

My mind likes not to dwell upon the scene. Suffice to say, my life was spared, though the Emir's own hung in the balance at the time. I was stripped of office and wealth, and my goods were given to the soldiery. With the Emir's aid, I took refuge secretly in the house of my friend, Abou Sad, son of Dakhdouk. There I remained hidden for forty days, whence I stirred but once, to cure the Emir Shems Addaula of a second illness.

But while I worked on my treatise on physics, the *Chifâ;* and added chapters to my "Canon," that teaches the whole doctrine of true medicine, Shems Addaula of a sudden died. Tadj el-Mélik reigned. And the new Emir wished to make me Vizier once more. But this I refused, since I had learned that men wish to rule and be ruled, not by philosophy and the rules of justice, but by expediency and guile, with force. Fearing the anger of Tadj el-Mélik, I hid myself in the house of the learned apothecary Abou Galib, where I continued my search into the causes of men's ills.

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* From the 12th to the 17th century Avicenna was the guide of medical study in practically all European universities. Even as late as 1650, his "Canon" was used as text-book in the medical schools of Montpellier and Louvain.

† Philosopher; Arab continuer of Greek philosophic tradition. The *hakim* or *nazir*, so commonly used in tales of Arabia, properly designates the independent seeker after truth, the speculator according to no particular system.

AT THE court of Ala ed-Daoulah, Emir of Ispahan, peace and quiet reigned and honor was done to learning. To Ala ed-Daoulah I wrote a letter, praying that a corner might be accorded me in his court to meditate and write. But the bearer of my letter was long-tongued and spoke of his errand to his sister's husband, and from her lips the news spread to the ears of Emir Tadj el-Mélik.

The bearer, being brought before the Emir, was tortured until he revealed my hiding-place. Whereat a dozen soldiers came to the house of Abou Galib the apothecary and dragged me forth. My crime being only that I had spurned the office of Vizier and had wished to leave the court of Hamadan, I was not put to death, but was confined in the fortress of Ferdadjan, near to Hamadan.

Now Ala ed-Daoulah, Emir of Ispahan, took this moment to renew war against Hamadan, whose ruler had taken into his service a large body of Turkish mercenaries, warriors greatly hated by all true Persians and Arabs. With a large army Ala ed-Daoulah came against Hamadan, storming the city and capturing it after desperate fighting. The Turkish troops were all either killed or expelled. Then those of Ispahan returned home with their spoil.

When Tadj el-Mélik saw that the battle was going against him, he deserted his followers, coming by swift horse to the castle where I was imprisoned. There he took refuge until all danger was past. The conqueror having departed, el-Mélik returned to Hamadan, taking me with him, that I might serve him as physician.

But now my mind was resolved to seek a final home far from Hamadan. More and more I despised the Emir for his cruelty, his injustice, his cowardice. The passing years had piled their snow of age upon my head. For my age was fifty; each year a double burden because of the life of peril and study and wandering I had led.

I longed for rest; for a sun-filled spot somewhere in Iran, where the alarms of war and bitter intrigue would not continually disturb a mind that brooded and searched, the spirit that soared. Though I hide not that I did not stint myself of lower pleasures, when the forces of the brain and spirit were spent, after days and nights of continuous mental toil.

And so I made my plans. And by the mercy of Allah, I won to Ispahan. El-Djouzdjani, my disciple and more than son, has set his hand to write at length concerning that escape. I praise his zeal, and do no more for my part than set down the barren facts, that the record may be complete.

From the hills of Hamadan to Ispahan the way is long and cruel, beset with all the perils of a wild and godless land. Eighty leagues of mountain and forest lay between me and the promised land of happiness. Forests filled with savage animals; crags crowned with robbers' aeries, robbers that took toll of each other and of the luckless wayfarers. But more inhuman still, the towns and villages of the plain that warred, and pillaged, and wantonly took life in the name of Allah.

And considering this, el-Djouzdjani's brother, who was unlettered and given over to belief in all manner of magic, spoke to his brother:

"In this pass it will go hard with us to win forth from Hamadan and to Ispahan. Now since the times told of in the tales before the court of Caliph Haroun al-Raschid, Commander of the Faithful, no man has beheld the mighty roc that bore Sinbad the Mariner from his peril. But can not you or our master, who is deeply learned in sorcery, summon to our aid the magic carpet of Bagdad, or the winged horse told of by the lady Shahrazád, that they may transport us safely through the air?"*

Now, knowing that man can have no control over the four elements of nature—Allah having assigned the fish to the water, the worm to the earth, the salamander to fire, the bird to the air—I made haste to dispel his ignorance. I spoke, and the brother of el-Djouzdjani bowed his head and listened ashamed.

"Know that Allah hath vouchsafed much to man. But he hath placed a threshold to our knowledge and presumption across which our science may never step. The air and the clouds are to the winged creatures, and of these will man never be, for who will give him wings to fly?"

With these and other words I so wrought on the minds of the brother of el-Djouzdjani and two servants with him, that they put away their foolish thoughts and sloth, and quickly made ready the means of escape.

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* The superstitious servant is here probably referring to the Persian version of the still uncollected tales, later known as "The Thousand and One Nights."

The market and narrow streets of Hamadan were already crowded one morning with soldiers of the Emir and buyers at the bazaars, when three men on foot, garbed in the pious costume of *sufis*, picked their way through the throng to the city gates, that had opened with the sun. Of these men was I, Ibn Sina.

None heeded the holy men as they passed through the gates, save a desert camel that grunted and plucked my sleeve in its snarling mouth. Into the rock country that surrounds Hamadan we passed and to a wooded hill two miles away. There the two servants of the brother of el-Djouzdjani awaited us with fast horses.

The way was long and painful. My bones were no longer young. Six days we journeyed, avoiding the larger towns and keeping, as much as might be, to the untraveled paths of the foothills. By night we lay beneath the stars, our beds the earth, for covering our cloaks.

Twice attacked by small roving bands and twice harried by the scum of villages through which we passed, we beat off our assailants, suffering only trifling wounds and much fatigue.

Past Sultanabad we stole; then stealthily across the plain, by night, to the hills that lie below Kurn Kuh; and down the valley east of Khonsar. Now, having thrown off our disguise of *sufis*, we took to the highway for greater speed. And well we did, for on the fifth day the horsemen of Tadj el-Mélik almost came upon us. But warned by the noisy trampling of our many pursuers behind us, we took refuge in a wooded glen and watched them pass. Their guide was one of those we had well beaten in a village where we were last attacked.

They turned to east; we turned to west, and saw them no more. And so the whole of the next day, until we came to Thabaristan. Before the city, drawn up across our road, was a troop of horse. We gave ourselves up for lost, even at the threshold of Ispahan. Yet as we spoke among ourselves and resolved to die, rather than surrender and return to Hamadan, an officer detached himself from his troop and came to us, to where we halted. He addressed himself to me.

"Greeting, Sheik Ibn Sina! Welcome in the name of my master, Ala ed-Daoulah, lord of Ispahan. To the learned Ibn Sina he sends greetings and the promise of position and honors at his court. And there will your gray hairs find sanctuary and your renown be honored."

And together with my four companions they conducted me to a house of Thabaristan, where we were bathed and dressed in fine garments and given horses of price for our entry into Ispahan.

Now for the space of many years I have my abode at the court of Ala ed-Daoulah, in peace and honor. My fame has waxed and spread. Disciples come to Ispahan to hear my words and learn the true science of human flesh and blood, as expounded by Galen, and Hippocrates and Ibn Sina. From Bokhara, and Teheran, and Tabriz; from Stamboul and the cities of the Grand Mogul; from the far towns of infidel lands they come. And depart not with unfilled minds.

Tadj el-Mélik has sent in his insolence a message to Ala ed-Daoulah, that I be returned to Hamadan. Ala ed-Daoulah, in wrath, threatens war on those of Hamadan and promises to tear their walls apart. He bids me to attend his army on their way, that I may feast my eyes on my revenge. But this I will not do.

I am a healer of men, and slay only that I be not slain. I am old and worn. El-Djouzdjani will soon close my eyes in peaceful sleep.

In Allah's name, let me be known as the compassionate watcher at the two thresholds of life.

MEASURE OF TWO MEN

by *Robert Welles Ritchie*

NOTE in the already dimming tapestry of the Indian Wars with its thousand threads of individual experience this short red strand of terror almost obscured by the general pattern:

It was during the time of California's Inyo County War, so-called, when in the early 'sixties the incursion of prospectors and stock men—none too scrupulous in their dealings with the Indians—roused the Piutes to a pitch of desperation. Nasty guerilla warfare ensued all up and down the semi-desert Owens Valley lying east of the Sierras in the east-central part of the State. A detachment of rough-neck California Volunteers initiated a private massacre of which not even the settlers could be proud. Joaquin Jim, chief of the Piutes, hung out his flag of red flannel bordered with raven's feathers, which meant no quarter for the whites.

During the height of the trouble three prospectors named Crow, Matthews and Byrnes went out from the little settlement of Independence and located the Cinderella claim in the White Mountains which mark the eastern border of the Owens Valley. On a November day in 1864 Matthews was guarding camp while his two partners were working on their shaft a few hundred yards away.

A ragged Piute and his squaw approached Matthews and asked to share the contents of a pot which was bubbling over the cook fire. When the white man turned to spoon out some of the slumgullion the Indian buck whipped a revolver from beneath his blanket and shot him through the jaw. At the same instant a shot sounded from up by the shaft mouth and Matthews saw Crow slump over the handle of the windlass at the shaft mouth.

Matthews, say the buried newsprints of the day, had some fight left in him and sent shot after shot after the retreating attackers. They appeared only to flee. Without ever a thought for his companions—Crow who had apparently been killed at the windlass and Byrnes who was at the bottom of the shaft—this fellow Matthews set out for Independence. He was that kind of man. The contemporary accounts recite that in his flight over the desert he threw away his shotgun and revolver and after two days was found near dead of thirst by a horseman.

But what of the other two?

Take the story of Byrnes, who was down at the bottom of a seventy-foot shaft. Of course he was ignorant of events above ground until the body of his partner Crow came hurtling down upon him—thrown down by the Indians whom Matthews had thought to drive away. Then came a rain of rocks which the luckless miner in semi-darkness could only fend by warding with his shovel. Next the windlass rape was pulled up by the savages on the surface; maybe they thought they'd killed Byrnes with their rocks or else they just wanted the rope.

At any rate, there was the man Byrnes seventy feet below the surface of the desert and with a dead man for companion. No food, no water.

Fill in for yourself the agony of Byrnes, alone with a dead man in a seventy-foot hole in the desert for five days. Five days!

His rescue was accomplished by a friendly Indian known as Joe Bowers, who, led by curiosity, had peered down a hole and heard a man's faint hail.

And how did the man Byrnes reward Joe Bowers, who had ridden to the nearest settlement upon his discovery and brought white men with a seventy-foot rope?

By a suitably engraved watch? No. By even so much as a couple of sticks of Old Peach? Ah, nay!

By attempting, a few years later, to crowd Joe Bowers off the land and water rights he possessed at Antelope Springs; an action which rallied all the decent white folks of Independence to support of the Indian.

DAVID

A story of young blood in the West

by

Walter Farnham

THE snake slid forward a foot, stopped part of its ugly body and drew the rest into a succession of half-loops. It lifted its head and ran out its tongue in barely visible flashes of faint crimson. Then it stretched forward, over the creek bank, questing the surface of the gently circling waters of the Fire Steel before it slipped slowly over the low bank into the deep pool above Adam's Ford. A lengthening "V" streamed backward from its neck as it swam, swiftly and warily for a point on the opposite shore. Midway of the pool the serpent paused and raised its head a few inches above the surface.

A boy was sitting his pony in the middle of the stream where the water gurgled over the ford. Knee-deep, the little horse drank thirstily and his rider whistled softly through his teeth as his keen eyes picked out the hesitating snake. He reached back for his gun. It was not such a weapon as his father and his brothers used, but instead, consisted of a fork of heavy wire, bent squarely and looped into a handle upon which was soldered a penny for a thumb piece. Two heavy rubbers and a bit of leather completed it. In his expert hands it clipped off the snake's head at twenty paces.

The snake's headless length coiled and recoiled, gradually sinking, but the boy whistled on indifferently and kicked the pony's ribs. Pinto grunted and lurched his feet loose from the sand, shaking himself a little and twitching the skin of his withers as he scrambled up the sloping bank of the creek and trotted easily away across the prairie toward the crossroad store.

"Whoa!"

A meadow-lark had settled on a dead cottonwood. It was a long shot but Jerry made it, sighting carefully and changing his aim once or twice. The bird drifted behind the tree in falling, and Jerry rode over to see his game. Its head was gone.

"Not so bad!" commented the marksman, viewing his victim without either remorse or triumph.

Within a mile of the store a hawk came, winging lazily along, and Jerry saw him coming, low down and keeping his eyes on the bunch grass and prairie-dog holes. Slipping deftly from his pony's back the boy crouched behind the animal, practically invisible to the approaching bird. The hawk saw what he mistook for a grazing horse, which he ignored as harmless to him. In that he made the mistake of his life—the last one he ever made.

Fifty feet from the stooping boy he sensed his danger and whirled upward but the round pebble impinged upon his flesh with a smack. His upward leap became a convulsive thrust, his wings beat half a dozen times and he fell into the grass.

Meditatively, Jerry wound the rubbers about the wire fork and rode to the store,

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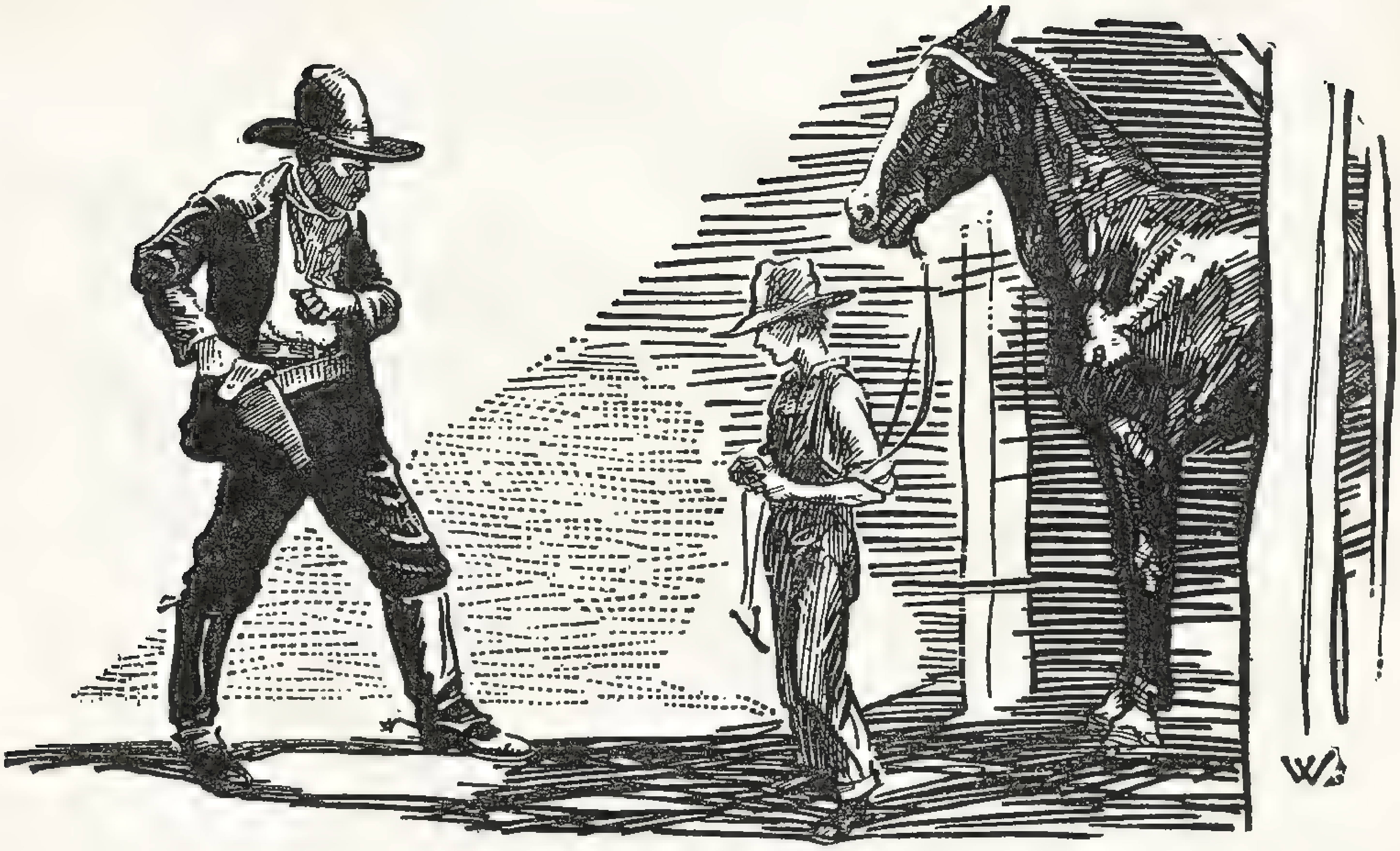
"David," copyright, 1926, by Walter Farnham.



the handle of the sling-shot sticking out of his hip pocket. His uncle owned this store, and his customers were scattered over a hundred square miles. He sold everything needful from a paper of pins up to the finest saddle made. He did not sell strong waters; if you wanted a saloon there was one over on Rocky Ridge. To reach it you rode five miles farther than the store or checked five miles before you reached it, according to the direction from which you approached the crossroads.

"H'lo, Jeremiah!" the proprietor saluted the boy as he swaggered into the store, rattling "Potty" March's spurs on the floor, "how come you to git here so airly? 'Tain't much more'n ten o'clock yet. Couldn't you git yore rest, or what?"

Jerry looked at him soberly.

"Whose black hoss is that tied to the hitch-rack?" he asked.

"That's yore Uncle Pete's hoss, Buddie. Go take a good look. You can't tell nothin' about a hoss, just siding a look at him thataway. Yo're seein' an eyeful when you look at that baby. I been tryin' to git that hoss for a year. I bought him off'n the OSD. Bill Lantry, up there, he bought him, a yearlin', off'n a tenderfoot goin' through. I saw him when he was a two-year-old but Bill wouldn't listen to nothin'. I bid plumb foolish on that young hoss. Now Bill's goin' back to Indianny and he don't need him. He owed me a sizable bill so he brung in this Black Bart, what he calls him, and swapped him to me for what he owed me. Let's go out and have us another look."

Jerry helped himself to dried apples and went out after his uncle, munching the fruit.

"What did you say his name is?" he asked, standing on one foot and sizing up the horse while he filled his mouth.

"Bill, he called him 'Black Bart' but, of course, I aim to change his name to somethin' else."

"What for? You can't git no better name for him than that. By gum, you ain't a-goin' to change his name, Uncle Pete; if you don't know no better'n that, I do."

"How much would you say I give for this hoss, Jerry?"

"Dollar. How much did you give?"

"Bill, he owed me a hundred and fifteen dollars and I tuk the fifteen and this hoss."

Jerry snorted.

"Yo're a dang old robber, Uncle Pete!"

His uncle was pleased at this tribute to the horse and to his own acute business sagacity. He roared with delight and slapped his nephew on the back.

"You shore think you know a hoss, don't you, Jerry? And so you do. This baby's all hoss and anybody with two good eyes will tell you the same thing."

Jerry crammed the last of the dried apples in his mouth and, with weighty mein, sauntered about the horse to look him over. Black Bart stood with arched crest, slender limbs daintily supporting a powerful body, eyes alight with gentle fire, and delicately pointed ears which pricked toward Jerry in eager friendship as the four-year-old gently nosed him. Jerry loved him instantly as he never had loved any other horse, not even Pinto the Great. He turned impulsively toward his slyly watching uncle.

"What think, Bud, is he a whole hoss?"

"Aw, Uncle Pete! I'll—I'll buy him off'n you! Give you fifty dollars for yore bargain."

"Fifty punkin-seeds!" scoffed Uncle Pete, "Yo're jokin' yore old foolish uncle, Buddie! You ain't got no fifty dollars."

Jerry stood in thought, quirting his boot. He walked around Black Bart, smoothing his glossy coat. He ran his hand down one slender foreleg and patted the ankle. The horse instantly lifted his foot, swinging his head to watch the boy. Jerry cleaned a little dirt out of the frog and lowered the foot to the earth with a sigh. He looked covertly at his uncle but the man was pulling the heavy foretop under the bridle strap and smoothing the mane over the lordly crest.

"You got to sell me this hoss!" blurted Jerry.

"Yeah, maybe!"—running his hand under the cinch and straightening a stirrup-leather— "When he's a lot older'n what he is now, maybe I will. Why, son, ain't I just been tellin' you I tried to get him for a year and couldn't? And here, right off, you want to go and jockey me out'n him! What ails you, Buddie? Don't you care nothin' for yore old uncle no more?"

Jerry walked around the horse again, smoothing his tail and putting his arms around the proud neck which arched down to his reach. Uncle Pete looked on in undisguised pleasure.

"I want him, anyhow," insisted Jerry; "I have too got fifty dollars; I got the whole hundred besides. I got more and I'll throw in Pinto."

"What, for gosh sake, would I want of a pot-gutted little calico hoss that can't ketch his own shadow when it's right in front of him? I don't want no paint hoss, noway; never had no use for the glass-eyed warts; they give me the creeps; they ain't no real hoss, they oughtn't to be allowed to breed. Yore little cayuse don't make the deal look no better to me, son!"

Jerry did not spring to Pinto's defense as his uncle intended him to do. Instead, he pursed his lips moodily and devoured Black Bart with fiercely hungry eyes.

"I ain't braggin' none on Pinto," he said, after a while, "but he's worth fifteen dollars of any man's money. I wouldn't let nobody but you have him for that."

"No, he ain't no tradin' stock," derided Uncle Pete. "Not in a deal like this here would have to be. 'F we was kind of tradin' hogs, now, or guinea-pigs, say but— Why, Buddie, this here black hoss is a regular bred mount; this ain't no cayuse, range stuff. Take another look! What are you thinkin' about? That there hoss is Kentucky strain or I'm a mud-hen."

"Well—you needn't to make him out so much. You only give a hundred for him. To listen to you a feller might think he was some circus hoss, learnt a lot of tricks. Besides, what use you got for a hoss—you don't never go no place! You ain't even got a place to range him. That hoss ought to be out in the open all the time, you know he had, darn you! You'll just tie him up in that little stable and break his heart."

"All right, Jerry boy, all right!" said his uncle with an abrupt change of tone and, at the sound of his voice, Jerry turned and looked curiously at him. Uncle Pete was looking through narrowed lids at some horsemen who were riding toward the store from the direction of the road-house at Rocky Ridge. They were coming at an easy gait, two of the horses trotting and the third carrying a tall, heavy man at a steady lope.

"We'll go inside," said Uncle Pete, shortly.

"What for?"

"I wish this hoss was anywheres else than here right now," remarked the man, backing toward the door of the store, his gaze held by the approaching riders.

"Why?"

"Come inside!" the man ordered and something in his manner made Jerry obey him.

Inside the building Uncle Pete spoke seriously.

"That big feller is Groaty."

The boy's eyes rounded.

"Groaty? The horse-thief? Go on!"

The approaching hoof-beats could now be plainly heard.

"Mind what you do, Buddie, whilst they're here! No matter what happens you keep still and as much out of sight as you can. No josh! Mind Uncle Pete, now!"

Jerry peeped out of the window and saw the three men looking Black Bart over. All wore heavy guns sagging from their hips. The big fellow—the one his uncle called Groaty—wore two. As Jerry looked he was examining the black's teeth. His approval of the animal was evident. Uncle Pete had gone to the back of the store and was busily moving some crates about when the trio entered. He came forward with a cordial greeting as the men lined up at the counter.

"Chawin'!" said the big man curtly, ignoring Uncle Pete's cordiality.

The merchant laid out a pound of plug and Groaty picked it up and bit off a chew over which he smacked his thick lips. He offered the thick slab to his companions and each helped himself liberally. Groaty dropped the rest in his pocket. He bought some smoking tobacco and threw down silver in payment.

"That enough?" he demanded, smiling derisively at Uncle Pete. Jerry noticed that his uncle hesitated for just a fraction of a second but he indicated his willingness to accept the amount tendered him. The men exchanged contemptuous grins.

"Whose hoss is the black?" demanded Groaty.

"Mine," answered Jerry's uncle.

"What'll you take for him?"

The storekeeper deliberated.

"I don't believe I want to sell, Dave," he said, quietly.

Groaty spat and grunted.

"Who the —— said you did? What'll you take for him? I don't give a —— what you want to do; I want to buy. Price him!"

The merchant was not a coward but he knew this man, partly by reputation and partly by experience with him in the past. He knew that he was facing a cold-hearted brute; a noted horse-thief who took what he wanted when he got ready. Black Bart was as good as ravished away from him already if Groaty had decided to have him. Uncle Pete knew that, for he would get no money for him if he sold him. Instead, the bully would write him a check on some far-off bank and there would be no funds to back it. To present the dishonored check to Groaty later would be death to the foolhardy man who tried it. Pete Dundy had not lived in the West for ten years without learning local history. Still, he could not quite bring himself to submit to such high-handed brigandage without an effort to save his face.

"Well, you long-eared coyote, price him! Price that —— hoss!" growled Groaty, leaning forward threateningly.

Uncle Pete shifted his weight and the desperado's eyes flashed.

"I just got done buyin' that hoss, Dave!" said the merchant placatingly, but looking the other in the eye. "I might price him to you later on, if you want. Right now I'd like to keep him long enough to feel him under me once. I ain't had a leg over him. I'd like to take a few rides on him so I could say I knowed what for ridin' hoss he was."

The big horse-thief deliberately drew one of his heavy guns and set back the hammer.

"Dundy, I'm in the habit of dealin' when I want to deal," he said, in an ugly tone; "you know me. I'm dealin' now. What's yore price on that black hoss?"

With the words he threw down on Uncle Pete's forehead with the big forty-five. Jerry gasped and the two companions of the big scoundrel stood like stones. Uncle Pete paled but he leaned back against the shelves behind him and smiled with an effort.

"Groaty, I ain't heeled," he said, "you've got the drop on me and I ain't got a friend near. Still and all—I ain't puttin' any price on Black Bart out there. I told you why; I want to own him long enough to ride him. I been tryin' to get that hoss for a year."

Groaty's face changed oddly and he lowered his weapon.

"So you want to ride him, do you? Want to see how he feels under you, eh? —— if I don't understand that, myself. Not that I care for you or yore wants, but I can take him with me as I go back. So ride him, —— you! Be back here by three o'clock or do worse. I don't want that saddle. Have it off him and him ready for the trail. Otherwise there'll be an opening in business here for somebody else."

He wrote a check, slowly, and threw it insolently down on the counter.

"Is that enough?" he sneered.

Uncle Pete did not look at the check nor offer to pick it up.

"I told you the hoss ain't for sale now, Dave!" Uncle Pete reminded him. "I ain't pricin' him; can't you take my word for it?"

"To —— with you and yore word!" snarled the outlaw, tearing the check and throwing the pieces of it at Dundy; "whistle for yore money, you —— fool! I offered to pay for him but now I'll take him anyway and you can charge him off on yore books."

He stamped to the door, his companions following him silently. There he turned and flung back his parting to the merchant.

"If I don't find that black handy when I come back you won't take no more interest in hosses from then on."

They disappeared down the trail in their own dust and Jerry licked his dry lips at sight of the sick look on his uncle's face. The boy dragged his boots across the floor, his spurs clanking on the boards. He leaned on the counter and looked blankly up into his uncle's stormy eyes.

"What's he mean, Uncle Pete?" he asked, in a scared voice.

His uncle looked over his head.

"You goin' to let him take Black Bart away from you, Uncle Pete?"

Dundy grinned but the grin made Jerry sorry inside of himself. It wasn't mirthful. The boy swallowed with difficulty.

"Say, Uncle Pete, you goin' to let him have Black Bart that way? You sellin' that hoss to that feller when I offered to buy him off'n you first?"

Jerry winked fast and something trembly was in his indignant voice.

Uncle Pete slouched a little lower, his lax hands partly in his pockets.

"I ain't sellin' him, Jerry, can't you see that for yoreself? Yit it looks like he's goin' to take him whether or no."

Indignation looked from Jerry's round eyes.

"You lettin' that danged son-of-a-gun walk that black hoss off and tell you to go to ——?"

Uncle Pete shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd shoot his guts out first, if Black Bart was my hoss!" declared the boy passionately.

But Uncle Pete shook his head in reproof of his wild statement.

"No, you wouldn't, son; you only think you would. Nobody's shootin' out Dave Groaty's guts for him. It's been tried more'n once and by men who knew guns like you know ground-squirrels. It's always Dave that cuts the fresh notch. He's powerful bad medicine."

"But that's no way to do—to let him take that hoss that way! Why, he's as good as goin' to steal him right before yore eyes, ain't he?"

Dundy nodded slowly.

"And you goin' to stand for it!"

Uncle Pete looked seriously at Jerry.

"I want to live a while yet," he said, mildly.

Jerry grunted disdainfully.

"Listen, now, Buddie, don't you go for to criticize yore old Uncle Pete like I see you hone to do. This here's a hard country and full of evil men. There ain't no law and I ain't qualified to make any. I never packed a gun and I never learnt to shoot none. You ain't never seen me with a gun on yet. I never learnt to handle one and I never learnt on purpose. When I came out here, first off, I seen how things was and I figgered that the best way to keep my hide whole was not to strap nothin' on. I've kep' to that idea. I lose a little thataway but I can kind of stay around as part of the scenery. Otherwise I might be some'ers around but I wouldn't show so plain unless pains was took to dig down to me. I would soon depart and be at rest if I started out to gun the bad actors that roam these perairies. I been held up three times in ten year but I more'n made my losses back again. Now, this here hoss, he's a hoss I been wantin' pretty bad for a long spell, like I told you a while back, but he only cost me a hundred dollars and he ain't worth dyin' over. I don't aim to resist none when Groaty comes back after him. I shore expect him to come; I look for him by three o'clock and the black'll be right where he is. I've seen this Groaty man shoot a gun."

"Run the hoss off to some pasture and turn him loose! Tell that —— to go to —— when he comes!"

Uncle Pete narrowed his eyes at Jerry.

"Will you get me a nice coffin if I do, son?" he asked.

"Would he kill you?"

"He done a trick like this over on Cottonwood two year ago. He warned 'Put' Stinson he would come and get his stallion at a certain hour and Stinson tuk the hoss away and hid it. Groaty never changed words when he found the stud gone; he just shot Stinson and rode off. If Black Bart ain't right there, tied to that post and ready when Groaty comes after him, this store'll be yourn from then on, if Groaty don't burn it down for orneriness."

"Ride the hoss to our place. I'll stay here till he goes. He can't kill you if you ain't here."

"I like you too well, Jerry. I'd hate to come back and find you laid out on the porch with yore hands crossed peaceful over yore innocent breast."

"Aw!" said Jerry, startled. "He wouldn't kill me! Would he?"

"The same as he would a snake."

"Let's both go!"

"And find the store burned when we came back! I got eight or nine thousand dollars' worth of stuff here, Jerry!"

The boy walked to the door and took another look at Black Bart. The handsome horse was pawing the soft dirt and snorting his delight at the perfect summer day. He caught sight of Jerry through the door and nickered eagerly.

"For a plugged nickel I'd ride him off myself and not bring him back," he cried, resentfully.

"All right, Jerry, you go ahead and do that!" said his uncle gently, "and when you come back just go by Castleton and pick me out a nice cheap funeral. Only I sort of hate to quit livin' for a hundred-dollar hoss. Seems like a feller is kind of gittin' the worst of the deal some way."

His uncle studied the boy's moody face.

"Don't think I don't hate this just the same way you do, Jerry," he continued, "because I do. I wish to —— I was good enough to shoot it out with the black-hearted cuss, but I ain't—not by a whole lot. Before I could start a gun out of the holster he'd shoot me till it got old to him. I know better'n to try it. After all this is only another kind of a hold-up, only the dirty devil likes to rub it in. He's got every advantage. As I figger the deal, Black Bart's his hoss unless somethin' happens, and it won't."

"All right, then," said Jerry, "they's no use a-talkin' any more about it. It's yore deal."

Uncle Pete sighed and began to stir himself to get them some dinner.

"You needn't cook nothin' for me," proclaimed Jerry, when he saw what he was about. "I ain't hungry; I'm too danged mad to eat a thing."

"Boys will git ready to eat when they smell grub," said Uncle Pete philosophically, and went on cooking.

After the silent meal Uncle Pete went out and unsaddled Black Bart. He fed and watered him and Jerry got the currycomb and brush and made the animal a complete toilet, although his boyish heart was full of resentment and his eyes were not free from mist as he worked. When every beautiful hair was in place and Jerry had even rubbed his hoofs with a soft cloth, the uncle and his nephew stood in the door of the store looking at him sadly.

"It ain't the hundred dollars, dang it, Jerry," said Uncle Pete, "it's that purty hoss himself. I been wantin' him for two year and now this here dirty hoss-thief, he comes along and takes him like this. How much hellin' do you calculate will this country stand from that outlaw before somebody 'tends to him right, Buddie?"

But Jerry had no heart for academic discussion. He wandered feverishly to the back of the store, turning over various objects to relieve some of the tension of his nerves. In an old-fashioned crock he found some ounce musket balls—three or four—and he put them in his pocket. He judged they were no good except for ammunition for his sling-shot. Then he strolled back and sat in the shade of the porch to wait for Groaty.

When the outlaw came he was alone. Arrogant in his confidence in the terror which his name inspired, he was riding leisurely to steal a man's horse as if his errand were lawful. He approached at a matter-of-course trot, his pony's feet jarring little dust eddies on the dry trail. Jerry's eyes blazed with hate as the hard-faced man checked in front of the store, contemptuously smiling as he noted the preparations which had been made for his possession of the black horse.

A keen glance around showed him that Dundy had no reinforcements to aid him in resisting the theft of the horse. That did not surprize him for, in that wild country, travelers were few and the telephone was not yet. Such persons as might have drifted in would not have hindered Groaty. No one who knew him would interfere; Uncle Pete's own attitude proved that; no use to die for a hundred dollars. Once dead, a man would be dead a long time, but a hundred dollars could be made back.

The horse-thief dismounted and threw the reins over his pony's head. He swaggered up to Black Bart without a glance at the store and Jerry wondered why Uncle Pete did not pot him with one of the rifles which he kept in stock. It seemed incredible to him that a man would submit to such an outrage without doing a thing to prevent it. In his suffocating humiliation at Uncle Pete's timidity, he made the motion of a frontier fighter; he reached for his gun. Then he found out why men did not shoot the guts out of Dave Groaty.

The outlaw had been engrossed in his gloating survey of the lovely horse but, as Jerry's hand moved toward his hip pocket, he whirled like a panther, a snarl on his lips and a greenish light in his eyes. The big forty-five flashed down on Jerry before the boy could breathe. Confused at the action of the outlaw he did not know enough to stop all motion but, his fascinated gaze on the round hole in the muzzle of the six-shooter, his hand came slowly forth, holding the sling shot. With his finger tightening on the trigger, the brigand saw what the boy held in his fingers. His face cleared and he laughed, holstering his gun with a single accurate movement.

"You —— fool kid!" he swore, "you be careful how you jerk around me. I —— near shot yore cussed head off that time."

He walked up to Jerry and jerked the sling shot away from him.

"What all is this?" he demanded curiously.

"It's—it's a sling-shot," gasped the boy.

"What's it for? What do you do with it?"

"It shoots rocks."

Groaty darted a venomous look at him from under lowering brows.

"Didn't aim to shoot me, did you? With that?"

Jerry shook his head, for nothing of the kind had been in his thoughts—until Groaty put it there. Then the boy thought of the swimming snake and the headless meadowlark, as well as the hawk which fell into the grass. He was canny in his reply.

"What good would it do to shoot you with this here thing?" looking scornfully at his boyish weapon. "I couldn't sting a rabbit with this if I hit him."

"You couldn't hit all out doors with it. Take a shot at that can!"

Jerry walked about a little, found a round pebble, took long, careful aim and missed the mark by three feet. Groaty laughed immoderately.

"Wait!" cried Jerry, in apparent chagrin, looking hastily about for another projectile, "dang it, I can shoot better'n that; I can hit that can."

The desperado taunted him vilely.

"You can't hit nothin'!"

"Bet you a dollar!" said Jerry, with heat.

"Keep yore dollar, you dang young fool," jeered the horse-thief, "you can't hit nothin'! You could shoot at a man a year and he'd never know it unless somebody else noticed it and told him."

"I could, hey?" began Jerry, excitedly; then he bit his lip. "Wait! Hold on, feller. I can hit it plumb."

His second shot went wilder than did his first.

"Wait! Third time's a charm. I can hit it."

"Aw ——!" snarled Groaty. He jerked his gun and drove the can hopping down the road, gratifying his vanity before the boy.

"There!" he snapped, pushing back his big hat and showing his broken tobacco-stained teeth in an evil grin, "shoot like that, why don't you? You can't do no shootin' with a couple of rubbers. Yore dad ought to kick yore pants for foolin' with such playthings. Get yoreself a regular gun, kid, and some day you and me, we'll have a shootin' match."

Subdued, Jerry kept silence but he reached for his bandanna to wipe his face, the sweat on which was not wholly due to heat. In the folds within his pocket he felt several hard substances and he remembered the bullets which he had taken from the old crock in the store. Instead of the handkerchief he stealthily drew forth one of the pellets and warily dropped by his side the hand which held it.

Groaty paid no attention to the boy after one glance showed him a picture of utter dejection, following his own exhibition of skill. Jerry stood a few feet from him, the steel fork in his left hand, the rubbers dangling loosely from it. If the movement caught the slanting glance of the outlaw it meant nothing to him when Jerry carelessly caught the little leather piece in his right hand and twisted it uncertainly in his fingers. It was only the movement of a discouraged kid whose weapon had been discredited by the performance of a better one. Yet Groaty was standing unprotected in the presence of a weapon of offense that was not to be despised.

The boy could not decide how to go about what he vaguely desired to do. He was barely fourteen and any elaborate plan of action was beyond him. He was afraid to shoot at the robber for fear he might miss him and he did not know whether he could do more than to irritate him if he did hit him. He knew that he must not miss if he started anything. Suddenly he knew why Uncle Pete was letting Black Bart go without a fight. Jerry did not want to die, even for Black Bart.

The horse-thief strode across the platform and called the boy's uncle from the back of the store where the merchant was sitting at his ledger, trying to be oblivious to what was passing outside.

"Saddle him!" the robber ordered.

Uncle Pete picked up the saddle which he had taken from Black Bart's back a couple of hours before.

"Not that one! I don't want no —— Mex saddle. Get mine off that cayuse and step lively."

To accelerate Dundy's movements he jerked his ready gun and plowed up the earth at the man's feet with several viciously planted slugs. With simulated good-nature the merchant leaped jauntily to his task of uncinching the saddle from the sweaty broncho. Jerry's muscles tightened convulsively as the horse-thief shot at his uncle whom he devotedly loved.

"Hey, quit that!" he cried.

Groaty turned, astonished.

"Quit what? Maybe you like this better."

The next second a shot grazed Jerry's boot and another twitched his sleeve, high up, near his heart. The horse thief laughed, throwing out the empty shells, one of which he snapped at the boy with his thumb and finger. Then he reloaded the gun slowly from the cartridges at his belt. Jerry stood immovable, his face pale and his eyes blinking.

"Wink 'em, Owl-Eye!" sneered Groaty. "You'll wink faster than that if you speak any more without bein' spoke to."

The outlaw's face promised dire things and Jerry remained discreetly speechless. Uncle Pete swore under his breath when the bullets tore past the boy but, when he saw he was unhurt, he went toward Black Bart carrying the saddle, bridle and blanket. As he passed Jerry he spoke softly.

"Easy Buddie! Mind what Uncle Pete tolt you! No hoss is worth a man's life."

The outlaw heard it and laughed meanly. When Uncle Pete stepped back from his completed task Groaty came forward, slapping his hands over Dundy's person in search of weapons. Finding none, he put his broad hand against the merchant's face, shoved him contemptuously backward and leaped into the saddle, his hand falling automatically to his pistol butt as he seated himself. His eyes bored into the man he was robbing but Dundy stood patiently in his tracks, keeping out of his face all resentment. Groaty swung the black's head slowly, enjoying to the last the discomfiture of his victim. The superb animal curveted and the sunlight made little fascinating streaks along his glossy neck and sides. Jerry was almost blind with his love for the horse and his rage at Groaty's insolence. The muscles of his throat began to twitch and he feared he was going to cry. He could not hold himself.

"Dang you!" he screamed at the horse-thief, "I'll get you for this some day, you big, dirty ——! I'll get me a gun and I'll foller yore trail till I get you for takin' this hoss!"

The outlaw checked his beautiful mount and wheeled him to face the boy. His face was cold, as cold as Uncle Pete's heart grew, watching the look of murderous hate grow in the horse-thief's eyes. Jerry's face was furious and he dared the dagger-like gaze.

"Don't mind him, Dave!" the merchant pleaded, genuinely fearing for the boy's life. "He don't mean nothin'—he can't do nothin'. It's just kid talk. He's only a young hound pup. He can't never do you no hurt. Go on, Groaty, leave him be! You got the hoss—never mind the kid!"

But Groaty ground his teeth irritably.

"He's a kid, and a pup, and all that now—yes! But pups grow into hounds and kids get old enough to pack guns if they are let live. I don't need to leave a keen-nosed youngster on my trail when he's so easy to stop as this one is."

Slowly he drew one of the big guns and lifted it above his head, the muzzle pointing at the sky. He looked angrily into Jerry's eyes which lost their rage and widened with horror. The outlaw held the gun in that position, prolonging the boy's suspense. Uncle Pete begged.

"For God's sake, Dave, don't shoot a kid! Don't kill him! He didn't mean a thing—Don't—don't!"

The outlaw considered, his restless finger caressing the trigger.

"Well—I'll let him off this time with a creasin'. I'll just mark a nice, white line down the middle of that sassy scalp of his to teach him manners when he is with his betters. I'm goin' to part his hair for him right down the length of his —— head."

"Good God, Groaty! Even then you may make him a fool all the rest of his life; you hain't got no such a grudge against him as that for a few fool childish words which don't mean nothin'—sure you can't have! You brag that you al'ays give the man you face an even break. You ain't givin' the kid no even break, at that. He's unarmed —and nothin' but a —— little boy."

The horse-thief caught sight of the sling-shot in Jerry's hands. He pointed at it with his left hand and chuckled evilly.

"The —— he's unarmed!" he mocked. "He's had his gun out all the time; he drew first. I can kill him in self-defense right now," he shouted ribaldly.

Uncle Pete took his life in his hands.

"You ain't fair to this kid, Groaty," he said quietly, "you ain't givin' him the chance you'd give a man, even a —— good man. You oughtn't to pick on a kid."

The outlaw turned his laughter into a scowl and his wicked glance flicked toward the man. Uncle Pete looked around at the sunlit prairie as one who takes a last inventory of this world but he did not flinch. The desperado dismounted and neck-roped Black Bart to the hitch-rack. He was chuckling again.

"Come on, I'll give the kid his chance, since my good friend Dundy makes a point of it," he said, with exaggerated politeness. "We'll make this regular if it's the last thing we ever do. No man can say Dave Groaty ever took advantage of him. This young squirt's goin' to remember me as long as he lives but he's goin' to remember that I shook with him to see who got the first shot. That's fair, shore! If he wins the throw he takes his shot at me and then I crease him; if I win I crease him and then he shoots at me."

He laughed, cynically, at the thought. In his mind he saw the boy, lying prone after a forty-five slug had ripped through the skin of his scalp, knocking him senseless as surely as a bullet through the head would do it if, indeed, the ball did not go through his brain accidentally.

Uncle Pete knew that further argument was useless. He knew that the outlaw, hurt in his pride, would lay the boy out with an accurate shot for revenge. He might, wantonly, at the last second, draw down a hair's breadth and kill him; he was capable of doing it. The storekeeper's feet dragged a little as he led the way inside.

"One throw, high man gets first shot," announced Groaty.

He seized the dice box and rolled out fours.

"Not hard to beat, kid!" he said, reading them at a glance.

Jerry threw sixes and a shade of annoyance crossed the robber's face. He tramped out to the road, glanced at the sun, marked off a spot facing the light, and paced ten steps on a line which left Black Bart a few feet to one side of the path of projectiles. He stopped and faced about, and Uncle Pete noted that the outlaw's back was toward the sun. For that the merchant was thankful. He wanted Groaty to have every chance to make his trick shot since he was bent on it. He motioned to Jerry to stand at the other mark.

The boy understood what was happening but he did not know that Groaty intended to crease him and lay him out without killing him. He believed that he was facing death and he went slowly to the station assigned him, gulping down a lump as he thought of his mother. Black Bart stepped alertly about and tossed his regal head as his young champion stepped into the lists. Never knight of old faced an antagonist for fairer gage. The horse seemed to sense the tension in the air and he whipped softly back and forth, now facing Groaty with hostile mien and then turning his large luminous eyes expectantly upon Jerry.

The horse-thief pushed back the flap of his sombrero and tapped his forehead with his index finger. Instantly Jerry was fascinated by the square of white skin topping the sun-scorched face.

"Right here, sonny!" taunted the outlaw. "Right where you see the man's finger pointing."

Then he folded his arms, derisively, and waited. He was thinking of pebbles, aimed painstakingly at a tin can and missing the mark by yards.

Jerry was cold all over. The big outlaw was a sinister figure of confidence and menace. The heavy handle of the Colt's which hung at Groaty's hip held the boy's attention with terrible magnetism. He tried to lift the futile little sling-shot but it weighed too much; it was like a leaden load in his hands. He pinched the ounce ball through the leather and tried to fix his wavering gaze on the white square just below the dirty hat brim, but hat square and bitter eyes were mixed into a mess from which he could not pick a target. He wanted to run; he felt that he was going to run.

Uncle Pete cleared his throat softly and Black Bart whinnied and tramped lightly about, his ears pricked as if he knew what was going forward. Jerry felt that his friends were for him. Groaty stood, insolently at ease, his cold eyes preying on the boy's nerves.

"Shoot, —— you!" he snarled, "what the —— ails you?"

Then, suddenly, Jerry was quite calm; he saw a lengthening "V" streaming back from the snake's neck on the surface of the pool above the ford.

Black Bart tossed his head high and snorted. Uncle Pete's mouth fell open. The boy's arms flashed upward, the wire fork clipped between Jerry's eyes and the taunting face. Scarcely a pause before his right hand snapped back to his ear as a bowman draws his shaft to its head. Jerry lunged a step, the rubbers whipped viciously and the lead thudded into flesh.

Uncle Pete sprang to his feet, one hand thrown out as in protest. The outlaw shrieked piercingly and clapped his hand over his eye. Black Bart half-squatted, beating a nervous tattoo on the hard packed earth with his dancing hoofs. Groaty staggered like a drunken man, clawing with his right hand at his gun; dragging uselessly at it as if it caught in the holster or as if the pain of his wound was so severe that he could not coordinate his movements. A trickle of blood forced itself from under his tightly pressed hand and smeared his drawn mouth. Swearing and moaning, cursing the boy foully, the horse-thief groped toward the spot where he had last seen him.

Black Bart appeared frenzied with fear of the shouting, reeling man. His large eyes rolled toward him and his ears were folded closely back against his head as he sidled about and sat back against the neck rope which held him. Twice he kicked at the outlaw but the distance was too great. Then Groaty caught his right toe behind the spur of the other boot and fell straight into the horse's swinging heels. The terrific impact threw the man's body on its back, ten feet away, with the neck broken as surely as it could have been done by the noose to which it had been forfeit for years.

Groaty lay still and Uncle Pete and Jerry looked at each other whitely. They went reluctantly to the side of the fallen man whose clutching fingers were buried in dust to the pallid knuckles. One glaring eye was set and glazing. From the gory pulp in the socket of the other an ounce ball peeped forth. Uncle Pete stared at Jerry and then at his weapon.

"God, boy!" he said, in awed tones.

Then he walked to the porch and sat down, wiping his face. They sat in silence for a space, looking at each other and at the body in the dust. Then Black Bart, fast calming down, whinnied wistfully and Jerry's thoughts swung back to the previous question.

"Give you fifty dollars for your bargain, Uncle Pete."

His voice shook as he said it. So did Uncle Pete's as he answered him.

"Fifty punkin-seeds! You ain't got no fifty dollars—and you don't need none. Ride him home as he stands! He's yourn; you shore won him in fair fight."

Going on with

TREASURE

A story of Chinese gold in the South Seas

by

Gordon Young

LIANFO was a copra port. The steamer came but once a month, when it came regularly, which was not usual; so, not hearing much of the outside world, the inhabitants chattered over and over of the small happenings in their midst.

Three men were lying on the beach, facing the dark water. One of these men was Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative as a parrot, as full of repetition. Another was Old Tom Wateman, thin, small, bandy-legged; a crabbed man with red-rimmed eyes. The other was a lazy young beachcomber by the name of Raeburn, Jack Raeburn. For a long time they had been shipmates on the *Dragon*, a black-hulled schooner; Will Heddon, master.

Heddon stood above six feet, was wide of shoulders and heavy of fists; he hated the islands, natives, climate, but loved the sea, and the wild tricky life of an island dodger.

He once had business dealings with a man named Walscher, one of the rich men of Lianfo. Of course Walscher got the best of him, which later led to Heddon's flattening him out. But he soon learned that on Lianfo a rich man's flesh could not be abused. Magistrate Davies—"Porpoise Davy," Heddon called him—was Walscher's good friend. Walscher, being a business man, cast an eye on Heddon's schooner. It was libeled—attached.

The three seamen were talking of this, and of T'eeay Layeen, the Chinese pirate. A remarkable fellow, people said; tall and dark eyed, with the look of royalty in his bearing; possessor of great treasure, too. But then, Heddon was said to know of an island of treasure, the existence of which he would neither affirm nor deny. People called him a deep 'un.

Denasso, the opium-smoking musician of a miserable troupe of show people who were stranded on Lianfo, came to Heddon with a message. Vioux, their manager—who was completely dominated by his snake-charmer, Madame, and Abdul, the Human Bull, a strong-man—was in trouble. He had brought a Chinese slave-girl, Po-Shu, to the island and now Porpoise Davy had her. Heddon asked where they had found her.

"Madame found her in Sydney," said Denasso, smilingly. "How or where I don't know. Really don't. It doesn't matter. Lovely child, Po-Shu, what?"

But Vioux would say: "My daughter, monsieurs, by my firs' wife. Ah, a marveelous woman, my firs' wife!"

There were Chinese who wanted her, too; so Vioux gave Heddon a great diamond he had stolen from Madame, as a price to kidnap Po-Shu and take them all to the mainland. Heddon pounded the thick bottom of an empty gin bottle on a piece of scrap iron, threw the glass into a chamois sack with the diamond, and persuaded Walscher to accept security for his lien on the *Dragon*, giving him the one diamond. Talk of Heddon's treasure was revived, and men of the beach planned to stow away on the *Dragon* when she sailed.

That night Magistrate Davies was dozing on his porch, when the kidnapers arrived. Heddon tried to talk him into giving up the girl; insults and reason, logic and jeers, meant nothing to Porpoise Davy. When he was finally tied up, his timid wife, begging mercy for him, led them to Po-Shu's room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

"Po-Shu? Po-Shu?" Denasso called coaxingly.

Heddon, holding the lamp high in one hand, turned to the bed and bent over it.

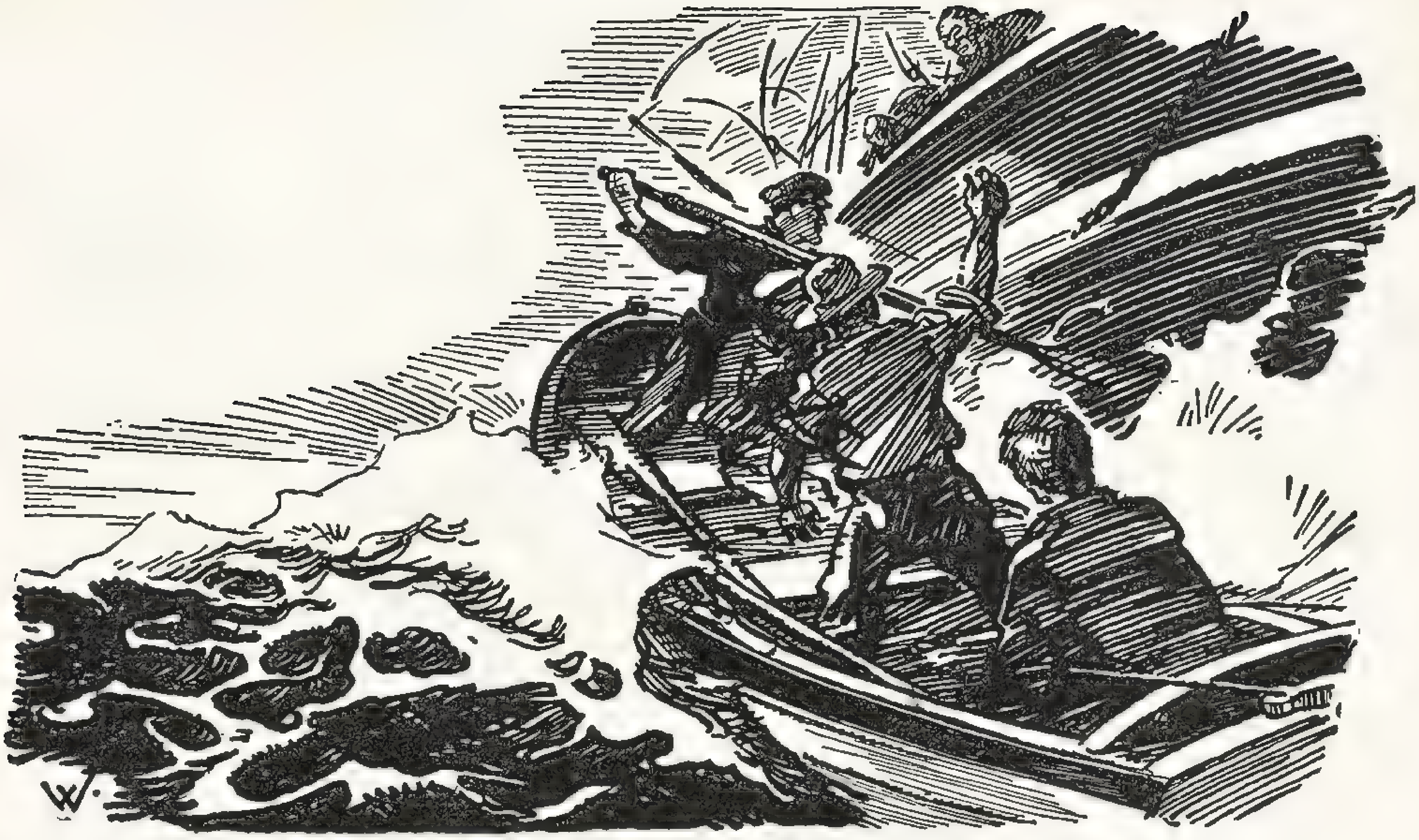
"She's gone!" he said. "Been gone—the bed's cold! Looks like the Chinks got her."

So they laid Mrs. Davies on the cot, tying her down with strips of torn sheeting. She understood their need of time in their getaway and was thankful that they had not hurt her husband.

"We'll leave him high and dry," promised Heddon.

She nodded excitedly. To the end of her days she would have a thrilling memory secreted from her husband.

"Treasure," copyright, 1926, by Gordon Young



WIND blustered amid the downpour. The surf far off on the outer reefs, made the sound of dull thunder; thunder itself growled and grumbled overhead like a sullen sky-giant, sleeping badly.

As they lurched through the darkness, Heddon shouted:

"We've some luck anyhow, Jack! There'll be wind enough for our hurry."

"Not for mine! When he slips that gag, he'll say, 'Hang 'em!' an' he's the judge!"

Heddon chuckled, heading into the wind, pulling Raeburn by an arm, Denasso by the shoulder.

When they had run down along the beach to the water's edge, they spread out in search of the boat, knowing about where it had been left. But a boat is a dim object on a wet night, and they searched about—stumbling against driftwood, feet dragging in the sand—for what seemed hours.

Presently old Barnes lifted the shout:

" 'Ere, you lubbers! But f'r a man wot 'as good heyes, like me, yer'd be stranded same as turtles, bottom up."

"If that ain't like ye, ye liar!" said Tom, as lightning gleamed and he saw Barnes rubbing his legs. "Ye brought up agin with your shins, same as a blind un c'd 'ave."

"It's my rheumatiziam. Allus troubles me in wet weather."

Tom made snorting sounds of disbelief.

The boat was tipped, spilling the water; then wading out knee-deep, they clambered in and set to the oars, with Denasso at the tiller and Heddon in the bow—to stare through the murk with rain-washed eyes.

There was nothing but lightning and the sound of the reefs to show the way, and now not much lightning. They pulled with hard and sullen stroke, through choppy water, and except for the taste on the lips, could not tell whether it was rain or spray that dashed into their faces.

"Wot a night!" said old Bill Barnes, grumbling loudly. "Aye, mates, wot a night f'r mulled ale beside a tavern fire. I can see the flame shadders a-dancin' agin the wall an' 'ear the wind a-roarin' down the chimney."

"With a wench listenin' to your sea-lies!" Raeburn—though nearly breathless from heaving at the oar—managed to tell him.

Rain sizzled into the salt water. The choppy waves, not big enough to have menace in them, struck the bow with slapping thumps. Tom grunted with a kind of rhythmic ease, Barnes wasted breath in a propulsive "huah!" Raeburn's back creaked and his arms ached.

Heddon said:

"Lay to it, or wear leg irons! Hard cases, all you—assault a magistrate. But worse for us, the tide 's due for the turn, an' we've got a sand bank to cross before the tide goes out—or we'll all be like Old Bill's turtles, bottom up. If the *Dragon's* left on her belly, it'll be prison, lads, for all of us. Lay to it!"

II

DENASSO'S teeth chattered; he was shivering from a chill that only the warmth of an opium pipe could ease, but he made no complaint, and presently without excitement, said:

"There's our ship. To port. A light."

They rested for a moment on their oars, with heads turned toward a far off gleam. They were waiting for lightning to split the darkness, and the lightning merely flickered dimly behind clouds.

"Stern ports," said Tom.

"Deck 'ouse," said old Barnes, who would agree with no man—least of all old Tom.

"Not ours," said Heddon.

"Ours? It is!" Raeburn told him. "No other craft lay this far out. And none but fools, like us, would be going out this time of night, and such a night. So it is the *Dragon!*"

"Your facts are right but you are wrong," said Heddon, staring into the black rain. "No lights show in the rigging, where I put 'em. That Vioux, who's no more to be trusted than a crippled viper, might have taken it into his head to up anchor on us. But I don't believe it. Still—" to Denasso —"lay us alongside, and we'll give her a hail to make sure."

They pulled for the light, carrying their heads awry, peering for outline of wood and rigging; and when her hull loomed vaguely like a more solid blot of darkness, they could see she was moving.

Heddon swore, saying:

"She's not the *Dragon*, but she's under way — outbound on a night like this! Something wrong."

Drawing his oar inboard, he turned, stood up, carelessly balanced to the rocking pitch of the boat, and through cupped hands roared:

"Ahoy there! What craft are you?"

She had been like a phantom ship, with no sound on her but the creak and rattle of wind blown gear. At his shout cries broke out, not answering him, but shrill thin cries, as if men called warningly, one to another, in a strange tongue.

Then an English voice, deep-throated, bellowed with a sort of friendly anxiousness:

"Keep off! The rails are manned—they shanghaied me for pilot, an' are lookin' for attack. Ye can't board 'er—"

A flame spurt winked through the darkness, and a musket popped. Other small arms were fired. Shrill cries rang back and forth along her deck.

Barnes swore loudly, and Heddon swore at him, telling him to shut up, that his voice made them a target. Then sliding down on the thwart with oar out, Heddon growled low:

"Give way! She's loaded with Chinks! They've got that —— girl. My head against a doughnut she's on board."

The girl was a guess; but the unintelligible voices had the high-pitched shrillness of excited Chinamen.

A few wild shots followed them off. One bullet whined like a disappointed wasp high overhead, but others, if they struck nearer, went unnoticed into the water.

Their faces were toward the ship as they rowed off, and when lightning glanced vividly through the crackled clouds, they saw a big lugger feeling her way through the night, probably with a lead line out, and, if no white sailors, at least a white pilot who had commanded silence about the deck, the better to hear the boom of the reef and so judge his bearings.

"A yellow-belly sea-slug boat!" said Heddon. "One of Hoopla's! Denasso, who the —— can she be to make them use a ship and crew, as if carrying off a yellow Helen of Troy?"

"A dance girl, Captain, is all I know. Though I've heard Vioux say, 'Worth half her weight in gold—if prince or sultan doesn't over-value his gold.' "

" '——!" said old Barnes. "King 'r sultan wot 'ud pay when 'e could cut off the 'eads o' them as arsk a price—'e ain't much good, 'e ain't, not at 'is job!"

"Yellow men to shoot at white in these waters, that's —— queer," said Heddon. "They thought we'd come out to lay aboard 'em. If we don't clear this harbor soon we'll have boats out to lay on board us!"

"She's off our 'ands. That's somepin," said Barnes.

"But Vioux's still on my hands, and an angry Frenchman makes a lot of noise. Walscher's agent was right! Man makes a promise in all good faith, but the gods are tricky. This night the yellow devils bamboozled my patron saint."

"No blarsphemy, Will 'Eddon! We've got the bad luck o' one wicked woman still aboard, 'er an' that 'idious sarpent! I got a warnin' feelin' in my bones!"

"That," Tom told him crabbedly, "is rheumatics, wot allus troubles ye in wet weather!"

"Blarsted 'eathen, you!"

"—— ol' hypocrite, ye!"

"I'll put yer in mind o' 'ow yer talked, come the time when I'm leanin' on the parypits, mug in 'and, an' you're neck deep in 'ell!"

III

THE night's bluster held on. Wind and rain danced together. It was a tropic downpour, gusty, drenching, and might last for days, or turn on the axis of a hurricane, sweeping sea and land.

Through long hot months the sun drew moisture from the ocean, and sucked it up through roots and out of every leaf in the jungle, and though showers slipped back from time to time to keep the jungle fertile, yet certain months were set aside for restoring the water by way of deluge; and punctually as if struck by a star-clock the rainy season came; and at such times even the sons of Noah, as old Barnes called sailormen, got their feet wet.

Heddon, peering from a twisted neck, was the first to sight the lanterns' glimmer in the schooner's rigging where he had put them for a beacon. Two were burning. They looked like tiny stars on a starless night.

"I wish to Heaven," said Raeburn, "we were out in the channel now—like that Chink is."

"Bill," Heddon told him, "Jack says you'd better do some noisy praying. We lose this tide, and it'll be the lockstep's rigadoon for us."

The boat was hailed anxiously from the *Dragon's* deck:

"Monsieur, it is you! How ver' long you have been. I wait alone here in these rain. Po-Shu? Ah, you liar-girl! —— it you soul, I will feex you!"

"We didn't get her!" Denasso called.

Heddon shouted—

"On deck, there!"

Vioux yelled—

"You do not breeng Po-Shu!"

From Heddon—

"Where's that —— crew?"

Vioux was stamping and yelling, calling upon Heddon to explain, upon Denasso, swearing.

The boat grazed the schooner's side. Barnes held on with a boat hook. Heddon scrambled to the main chains and over; he shoved Vioux aside in the darkness as he took up a coil of rope from a pin rail, shook it loose, said, "Below there!" and dropped the rope.

The lightning showed Vioux's small form in a big man's oilskin. It scraped and rustled as he moved. He got before Heddon demandingly, and Heddon caught him, held him rigidly, saying:

"She wasn't there. Chinks got her. Stand from under till we get to sea, an' you can have the story. But back now, an' keep back!"

He turned Vioux loose with a shove, and shouted, "On deck the crew!" There was no answering shout. Heddon jumped along the deck and bawled down into the forecastle: "Below there, you dead men! Shake a leg!"

He stood for a moment, crouched as if about to leap down the ladder and fling out the crew, bodily.

Below was the dim haze of a lantern in a bracket. As he watched, nearly minded to jump, there was a stirring of shadows, then an overly anxious—

"Aye, Captain!"

"Comin', sir!"

"Shake a leg, mates!"

Figures appeared on the ladder with faces upturned in anxious staring.

Vaguely Heddon sensed something wrong, if not wrong at least strange. True enough, the men were snugly below when they should have been on watch for his return, and there was the whiff of gin in the stagnant forecastle air; but these fellows had a manner of tense nervous guiltiness that was not natural in hard-headed seamen.

If he had not been in a hurry Heddon would have jumped below for a look about to see what he could see; but the men were stumbling up out of the gloom into the darkness of the deck.

"You! Soldiers on a junket!" said Heddon. "Aft an' heave up the boat. Then to belly-work on the capstan!"

The men bolted aft. Heddon started to follow, but turned at the deck house and passed the galley to come to the lamp locker.

In the darkness some man was crouched, lurking there. Heddon came against him unexpectedly; the fellow lost his footing, was bowled over, with Heddon coming down on top of him and thumping his head against the deck to take out whatever fight might be in him.

Oaths in brogue and a flare of lightning revealed the man; and Heddon, half dragging, half lifting the fellow, threw him into the galley, reached into a match-box, scraped the match across the stove and held up the flame.

"So, Grogan! You've sold your farm to go to sea, eh? Want to learn to be a sailor? What you doin' here?"

"Ow!" said Grogan, with a hand pressed to the back of his head, looking injured.

"What you doin' here, I asked you!"

"Ow!" Grogan repeated, and put both hands to his head. "Oi couldn't stand the rowin' wid me woife an' so Oi—"

"All right, turn-to now, and lie to me later. If your Missus didn't shanghai you to be rid of your carcass, the Devil did in the hope of getting it sooner! But turn-to you will, and lie, too, when you have the chance. Out on deck—bear a hand or overboard yourself! On the jump, Grogan!"

The deck was stirred with shouts and trampling in the rain; oaths clattered. The boat they were to hoist had gone adrift, was floating off with the out-going tide. To lower away the other boat and go after it would have meant loss of time.

"Let it go!" said Heddon. "We'll be lucky to get out o' here! An' here, Tom—" he thrust Grogan forward— "here's a new hand. He's heard the sea offers advancement for bright young boys."

Old Tom swore at him, kicked at him.

As they stumbled forward in a rush, Grogan thrust his face close to Raeburn as the lightning danced about them:

" 'Tis yezself, eh, Jack. Oi'll have a wurd wid ye, bhoy, widin an hour. ——— him! We'll show thot Heddon a thing 'r two."

IV

VIOUX had spluttered questions at Denasso from the time he crawled up the sea ladder; but Denasso, having sat in the sternsheets, wet and nearly idle, had got his blood chilled and now he shivered.

He could always touch heaven with three feet of bamboo, and if the ship were being scuttled, he would have taken time to put pipe to lips.

He went down to the cubby-hole of a pantry, where he had spread a pallet, for smoke he must in close quarters, else sweet lassitude would not settle upon him. He had been assigned to a room with Abdul, a room not much bigger than a double-decked coffin, but Abdul did not like the smell of opium.

Vioux followed him down into the pantry and pelted him with questions all the while that Denasso sat on his heels, shivering from poppy-ache and cold, sniffing the fumes eagerly as he dipped the gum on a needle point into the flame of a short candle, daubed upright in its own grease on the narrow bronze tray. His glass lamp was empty of oil. He could not wait to search about for the can to fill it, though the sperm candle, he said, would give the witching smoke the flavor of the try-pot.

Denasso bent forward, tensely, as he twisted to and fro the hand that held the long needle, spreading the gum on the pipe bowl, drawing the opium into strings over the flame, rolling it back on the pipe, shaping the gum into a small ball, pea-sized, then prodding it down into the center of the bowl, warming the bowl at the flame, prodding all the while dexterously with the needle—eagerly, deftly, going through the intricate rite by which the poppy-devils are summoned to give easement of the pain that feeds upon their votaries' flesh and bone.

"Curse of a curse of a curse!" said Vioux, glaring, twiddling his mustache points, anxious to know what happened.

Denasso would not answer. He got a kind of pleasure out of Vioux's fretful anxiety. He knew that Vioux was afraid to go to Madame and say that Po-Shu had not been brought. One did not run eagerly to Madame with unpleasant news.

So Vioux sat on a stool, fidgetted, bounced up, plucked at the black tuft on his chin, and at times fairly hopped as if the deck was too hot for his feet; he swore, sniffed at the smoke, coughed, cursed in thieves' argot; but nevertheless must wait until Denasso had smoked enough pipes to soothe and warm him.

Denasso was a cunning smoker. He seldom went beyond the point of a mild, restful lassitude; his dreams were waking dreams, colored with thought, and now in the pantry his brooding thoughts hovered over Madame and Vioux.

He afterward told young Raeburn, whom he liked, that from the time he got back to the ship he was aware of wanting to overhear Vioux and Madame quarrel.

Madame, he said—at a time when mellowed with smoke and quite convinced that Raeburn was no babbler—was a woman who had seen much of the world, traveled far and made hasty departures.

In her youth, he supposed, she had been rather attractive, with perhaps just a touch of that diablerie that fascinated men and—this with an inquiring shrug—snakes. Perhaps never the most elegant of men, for though Madame made a rite of cleanliness and used much perfume there was a snaky odor always about her. The serpents, he said, less fickle than men, yielded still to her blandishments though youth was gone. With the going of youth she had put aside many of the winsome pretenses that, like rosebuds and gay ribbons, become the young more than the old. Her adventures had been many; she played against fortune as against the spinning wheel, and like the thorough gambler that she was, usually lost whatever she won.

"All greedy persons are gamblers. That is why they gamble!"

Vioux her brother? No, oh no, not at all. Vioux was, or said that he was, a nobleman who had fallen from family grace. "A towering fall," said Denasso, "or merely a swindler's lie." At least he had the aristocrat's hands and feet. For some years she had honored Monsieur with an emotion that she called love; perhaps at one time his debonair flare had pleased her fancy. But now, love? No woman loves the man that she can terrify with a word; this word was "Noumea," which was to say penal servitude on New Caledonia.

Why? Oh, Vioux was so much the thief that he had cheated his confederates in a little affair that had to do with a diamond robbery. These associates avenged themselves by sinister whispers to the police. He was arrested, convicted, deported to New Caledonia. Worst of all, the diamonds had been recovered under circumstances that put Madame in a bad light.

She had from time to time been suspected of other things; she, Vioux, and Abdul, had little ways of getting money when business was not good. Abdul, being a fool, merely did as told. It was Vioux who would splutter and swear like a greatly wronged man when a stranger was discovered in Madame's apartment; but Abdul would be there, at Vioux's back, and Abdul's size and pop-eyed glare frightened strangers.

"Abdul is afraid of Madame, yet quarrels with her. They have to get angry in English, which neither speak well. She knows no German, and he won't try to talk French. Human bull, he is; but lazy and simple-minded. Not a bad fellow, but half-witted. More stubborn than any bull. Precious to Madame because his great size made men afraid of Vioux."

After the miserable police—said Denasso—had taken Vioux off, Madame missed him more than she had expected; it was as though she had lost a talisman. Unlucky things happened.

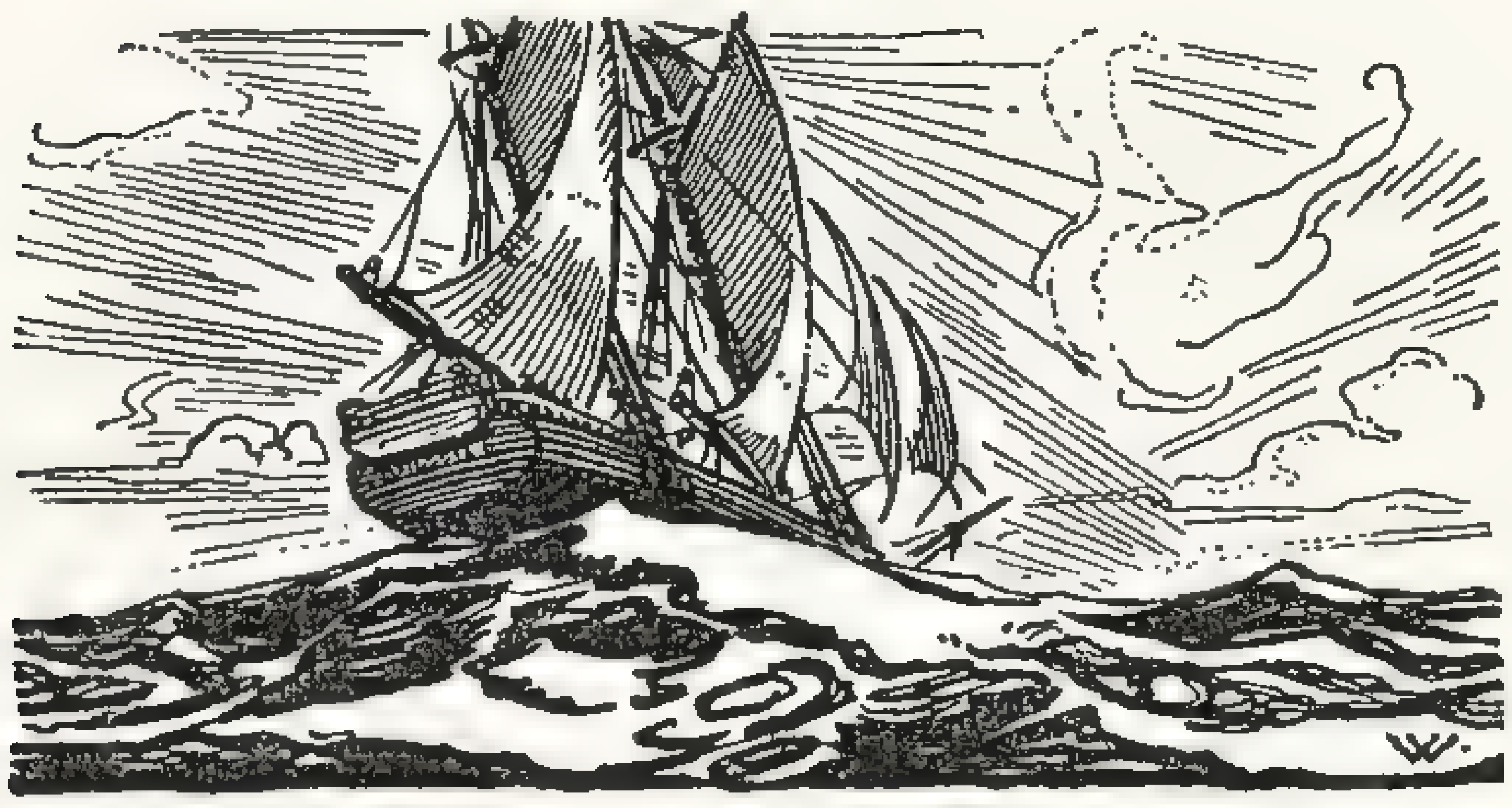
"When a woman can no longer wipe her face without rubbing away its beauty, she grows thoughtful. Her hair? Dyed or not, I don't know; but no man has ever seen it except braided and coiled as she always wears it. One night she jumped from the window of a burning building into a blanket—kept her hands on her hair as she jumped! I was there and laughed. She takes care of her appearance, always, as a good woman does of her virtue—or should."

Vioux was hardly out of the country before the stupid police had summoned Madame to answer some questions about matters which Madame wished they would forget. Their attitude was unfriendly. They had the impertinence to suggest that Madame consider the benefits of foreign travel.

It seemed a good time to wipe France from her feet. She thought of America, but chose Australia, this being near New Caledonia. She took with her Abdul, the negro Zudag, and Denasso.

Madame was by no means inexperienced in the art of communicating with those whom the wretched police had sequestered. She and her snake went to Noumea, alone. Certain arrangements were made; and the escaped Vioux, being small of body departed from New Caledonia in the snake's green box, while poor *babee*, having been gorged on a young pig to make him sleep well was coiled into a barrel.

"I think she did it more to spite the police than for Vioux's sake," said Denasso drowsily.



IT WAS while Vioux and Denasso, in the midst of opium smoke in the pantry, talked of Po-Shu, that Heddon with a sliding clatter of heels on the stairs, dropped into the cabin and swung toward Abdul the Turk, who sat ponderously at his ease before a small collapsible table that was arranged so that it could be stowed away overhead.

There was a bit of chill in the gusty rain, but the cabin was dry and warm, almost hot, and the air was moist and sticky.

Abdul, the Turk with a noticeable German accent, was a whale of a man, but like the whale carried a sheathing of blubber; he was warm blooded, perspired freely, puffed too. His complexion was dark, otherwise he would not have been able to pass himself off, professionally, as a Turk. As part of the showman's show, he wore a fez, so as to be conspicuous, pointed at, talked of. He had grown rather to like the fez on his head. It was red and tasseled, quite an ornament.

He was a hairy fellow, and did not shave every day unless he was to perform in the evening. His feet were so large that shoes were made to order, and these were rarely comfortable. Abdul sat about much, as now, in his stockings. Shirts were hot, particularly to a chest covered with a tangle of hair very like dark wool, so he sat in his undershirt, with this unbuttoned and sleeves rolled up; and from time to time he scratched at his breast, at the back of his shoulders, at his ribs.

The room in which he had been quartered was hardly big enough for him to turn in; there was no place in the small room where he might sit at ease, and the bunk was so narrow that, when he lay on stomach or back, a part of him must lap over the edgeboard. So, not without justification, Abdul found what comfort he could in the schooner's cabin, smoked many cigarets and scratched himself.

Through the skylight Heddon had seen him and came clattering down the ladder. He made such a racket with his heels that Madame, in slight alarm, opened her door an inch or two and peered out.

She had impatiently kept to her room because she did not like Abdul's company. His grunting, boasting, complaining, drove her frantic, and she was so nearly fastidious that the sight of his sweaty undershirt, his hairiness, his scratching—"like a dog wiz fleas!"—was something she avoided. Though she could, if properly angered, frighten him, she could not order him about without a quarrel; and she did not like to scream when she quarreled, which was about the only way that Abdul could be made to understand that she was angered. He was too thick headed to be impressed by anything milder than a shriek.

Madame had long been anxious about Heddon's return; but scarcely anything could have made her go on deck in the rain. She would never permit herself to be bedraggled.

She was surprized to see that it was Heddon who came down the ladder, and she opened the door to step out and ask questions; then she paused. His look was so direct at Abdul's face that she waited to listen.

Abdul's was a large heavy face, with ferocious eyebrows that had been trained to poke out like small horns, but his eyes were more dull than fierce. Except when strutting, he was a rather good-natured fellow, easily pleased though hot-headed like all Dutchmen; but he was readily boastful and something of a bully in his eagerness to show off; which may have been why small men, from whom physical rivalry was out of the question, could do more with him than full grown men. Often he assumed the insolence becoming, or unbecoming as the case may be, in one advertised as the Strongest Man in the World.

"Strong Man," said Heddon hurriedly, "come along and bear a hand at the capstan, will you? The Devil or coral has snagged our anchor and the grunts of the crew can't break her out. The tide's on the turn. If we cut and run now we won't more than clear the bar. If we don't clear it, we're aground for ten hours and in jail for life. An' if we slip the cable we lose our only anchor, which is bad luck—or —— likely to be. Come along an' bear a hand."

Abdul grunted and scowled; the grunt was surly. "Come along and bear a hand," had in it the snap of command. Abdul grunted—

"Nuuh!"

"What's that!"

"Mein passage it iss baidt!"

Abdul then settled himself deeper into the chair, extended his legs at full length, lifted a cigaret to his lips, inhaled deeply, blew the smoke upward, and watched the smoke as if nothing else interested him.

Madame held her breath, half minded to step out and storm shrilly at Abdul, for she knew enough of sea-work to know that what Heddon asked was urgent; but she paused, curious.

In the cabin silence there was a pittering drip from Heddon's clothes. That was the nearest sound. The flap of water at the schooner's side, the splatter of rain, dimmed voices and the hurried shuffling and stamp of feet, even the thunder's rumble, were far away, unnoticed.

Heddon's neck seemed to shorten, his shoulders lowered, and a black frown shadowed his eyes.

Abdul noticed, and returned a pop-eyed glare, contemptuous, menacing; then, as if there was no need of further thought for such an insect as this, he, with a slow flourish, held his cigaret at arm's length and watched it as he dexterously touched away the ash with his little finger. Then with insolent inquiry he lifted his prickly eyebrows in a glance at Heddon.

"On deck!"

Heddon's arm swung toward the ladder, showing the way.

Abdul's reply was obscene. Then he puffed his cheeks and blew with a *buahing* sound. As if he had blown the insect out of the cabin, he put back his head, gazed upward, and was placidly returning his cigaret to his lips when Heddon came at him with a hurtling headlong jump, crashing the table, falling upon Abdul, overturning Abdul, chair and all, striking with knee and fist as they went with wild thrashing of legs to the deck.

Heddon topped six feet and had a doorway's breadth of shoulders, and every pound of weight had been packed into his skin by hard work; to him a fight more or less was part of the work, as well as part of the fun on shore when he drank and darkly jeered men.

Abdul had wrestled some, but his size being what it was, he had never had to fight, and knew hardly as much of the floundering rough and tumble where fists are used instead of fingers as he knew of boxing. He had a crushing weight in his arms, but was awkwardly slow in grappling, and could no more close on Heddon's neck than he could have squeezed an eel.

Given time to stoop and finger for a hold, Abdul would have heaved Heddon overhead and let him fall; but now he had gone over backward and down with the breath knocked out of him, his bulky paunch sickened by the drive of a bent knee, and his head rattled from fist blows.

Heddon chanced close work, flesh to flesh, gouging and pounding and grappling with a man who could and would have killed him if the massive arms had slipped into a lucky hold, because this brute needed to know who and what a captain was if there was to be a captain whom men answered nimbly, on the jump; and the fight must end quickly so that the schooner might be on her way, sneaking through the black rain and out to sea.

Abdul, in a confused way, grappled encirclingly, squirming to rise knee-high, break Heddon down and roll him under; but Heddon's back bent out like a bow, his hands on Abdul's throat; then the bow bend of his back straightened in a lurch, and he struck with a knee at Abdul's belly, with crooked elbow at Abdul's chin—both murderous blows, struck to escape being murdered.

Abdul sank back and down, groaning. His hands groped in vague motions, protectively.

"*Nein, nein*," he muttered, saying something unintelligible in German.

The fight was over.

Heddon stood up, shook himself, poked Abdul with a foot, said:

"On deck an' to the capstan! An' by ——, you go if I have to carry you a leg at a time!"

Abdul groaned more loudly, opened his eyes, stared up blankly, unbelievingly. He did not know how it could be, but so it was, for his body had the ache of bruised flesh; thus he knew that he had been thrashed.

With a kind of wallowing slowness he

began to get up. In rising, he paused, his eyes filled with a baffled stare. He, professionally the Human Bull, simply could not understand. He had been overthrown, pounded, knocked about, choked, bruised, kicked and beaten, all in a minute—he, Strongest Man in the World. Abdul had heard the title so often that he quite accepted it as fact.

"You beadted me—me!" said Abdul, still on one knee, speaking humbly, with a kind of reproach. His pride was hurt.

"On deck!" Heddon pointed, again showing the way; and Abdul, in stocking feet, his undershirt ripped from a shoulder, and the swagger gone out of him, heavily climbed the stairs.

Heddon watched from the foot of the ladder, waiting for him to clear the coaming before following; and as Abdul's bulk passed clear of the ladder, Heddon started up, but was called—

"Monsieur!"

He turned.

"Monsieur, I saw! You are *magnifique!* So saveege!" Madame doubled her fists and worked them about, frowning; then smiled brilliantly, "Ah, spleendid, you! Peeg, zat Abdul!"

"He's all right now—good as a winch!" said Heddon, going on.

"Monsieur!"

He turned on the ladder—

"We've got to get out of here!"

"But Po-Shu, monsieur. Po-Shu?"

"Chinks got her!"

"Who, monsieur? What is eet you mean?"

"Chinks. Yellow-bellies. They stole her—first!"

"*Chinois!* Zey haf Po-Shu! Monsieur, theese ship do not go! We mus' stay! I weel haf Po-Shu—"

She broke excitedly into French. Her black eyes blazed at him, and loudly she began to call Vioux! Abdul! Zudag! Gro-gan!

At that last name, Heddon turned and came down a step on the ladder, eyeing her with a suspicion that meant trouble; but on the instant, from somewhere, the negro came, slim and sleek, freshly oiled; a sullen, evil-looking fellow.

"Madhouse, right!" said Heddon, and jumped from near the middle step of the ladder to the deck, landing beside a chair. He slung the chair about, its back to him, then grasped the back, and to the negro said—

"You make a move an' I'll break this over your head!"

"He do not speak Engleesh," said Madame. "But my head, you break eet over my head—I dare you do zat!"

"You mess o' freaks! One more bit of trouble an' I'll cut you adrift! Back on the beach, all you—I'll put you there!"

"But monsieur, you haf not bringed Po-Shu! An' so fine saveege man as you, monsieur—why haf you not bringed Po-Shu?"

"I went for her. Into the house. Into her room. She was gone. The Chinks got her, I tell you. Rowing back we passed their ship. They opened fire. They're out to sea by now. But we—we left old Porpoise Davy tied like a market pig. All Lianfo may be out here after us any minute! It'll be prison, for you, for me, for all us. We've got to get that anchor up an'—"

"Ah, pardon! Pardon, monsieur! Ze anchor, yes? I heard what you say to Abdul. You follow ze Chinks. An' get Po-Shu maybe, eh?" Her excitement grew. She spoke rapidly to the negro, gesturing explosively. Then to Heddon: "Zudag he will help wiz the anchor too. Up, up, fas'! Julien"—Julien was Vioux—"Make heem to work. Queek, monsieur! Make all to grunt, so!"

She grasped an imaginary capstan bar, leaned forward, grunted *unh!* then with hurried flutter of tongue and hands sent Zudag up the ladder.

She called after Heddon:

"Monsieur, oh, how I trus' you, monsieur! So saveege! *Magnifique!*"

V

ALL was in readiness for making sail and the *Dragon* was hove short to the fouled anchor. Men were clustered at the capstan bars. Tom, hand on the cable to feel it give, bent low and swore through the hawse hole as if hard words might jar loose whatever had laid hold.

There was hush and grunting and strain of bodies; the bow dipped to the trough of a harbor swell and clicking pawls took up the slack; the bow, hove shorter than short, rose and the cable tautened like a drawn bow string. The anchor must come or cable snap.

And whether it was old Tom Wateman's curses, chosen from forty years of sea-work, or Abdul's weight, which lacked but little of enough to snap the capstan spindle, or perhaps the Devil's hand on the fluke had weakened from cramps—anyhow the anchor came home.

CHAPTER IV

SHOALS

THERE was loud bawling and rush of feet over the wet deck. The jib was run up. Raeburn held the helm hard-a-lee, and as the schooner fell off so that the wind began to lie on her bow, Heddon led the work at setting main and foresail.

"—I'll put 'er over that bar or dismast her!" he had said.

Abdul bulked clumsily about the deck. Old Tom yelled praise at him. Abdul did not know one rope from another, but if a rope was put into his hands and he was told to walk away, he walked; and Tom, not knowing anything of the fight in the cabin that had brought Abdul on deck, clapped his shoulder and called him "son." It wasn't but a little while before, when Old Tom swore at a man, Abdul would swear at him too in guttural broken English.

Heddon took the wheel. With feet wide apart and hands knotted on the spokes, he felt like a blind man and was no better than one except when the lightning struck haphazardly; without the lightning there was nothing much to be seen farther off than the glow of the binnacle lamp.

The wind struck with gusty blows; the rigging shivered and rattled, and the *Dragon's* old bones creaked as she heaved ahead, her painted eyes much of the time as good as any man's for seeing the way.

Men stood by to trim or douse, and stared blindly; they could see white glints of froth on the choppy water, but nothing farther off until the lightning came. Rumbling of thunder mingled with the loudening roar of the surf, but the only voice heard about the deck was Raeburn's as he leaned against the breast rope and drew the lead line up through the light of a swaying lantern that Old Bill held on a line for him.

A play of lightning came that set the water shimmering, and with a far glance he saw where the water frothed in its shoaling on the bar. There were startled oaths from other men who had seen the same.

Heddon put his weight to the wheel, veering off, heading for the deeper, more dangerous water, nearer the harbor's mouth where the bar was flattened by the inward drive and outward suction of the tides.

"—an' a quarter less five!" Raeburn bawled. He had served a man o' war's apprenticeship and was a good leadsman.

"Shoals 'er water fast!" said Old Bill.

Raeburn, leaning far out, sent the lead forward into the dark water. It sank. He felt the lead touch bottom, and gathering in the slack, bent low to scan the mark by the dangling lantern as the line came plumb.

"An' a half four!"

"Faster, Jack, faster! Coil an' cast!"

With the wind almost astern they had gathered a clipper's speed, and the line swept by so fast that it was with half a guess that Raeburn shouted—

"Quarter less four!"

"We'll never myke it!" said Old Bill.

The schooner in light ballast drew nearly nine feet of water, and here they were in less than twelve, with the bar still to be crossed.

"By the mark three!"

As he heard, Heddon braced himself for the expected shock, and in the time that he could hold his breath, it came. The schooner struck with a scraping jar that slid men off their feet, and sent them rolling about like overturned ninepins, scattering alarmed cries out of them.

Raeburn, with arms out in a grasping embrace, was slammed against the shrouds, and held on with a seven-pound lead line dragging through the water.

There was a moment's confusion as if the *Dragon*, aloft and alow, were suddenly alive with pain and protest; the whang of stays, clatter of blocks that had been hauled fast as the weight of men could set them, the creaking yelp of strained timbers, made the sounds that forewarn disaster; the wind spilled from the jib, and it flapped and cracked. The gaff sail had split like a blown paper bag that is smashed by a child to hear the pop and flew off into the night like paper torn to shreds and scattered in one handful's throw. Boom tackle jerked as if to jerk the ribs out of the schooner as the sails heaved, flapped thunderously, heaved again, struggling with almost the same beating of wings as a bird frantic in a net. All in a moment or two the bow sank, the stern lifted; the *Dragon* inched forward on her belly; the stern struck again, again the bow dipped and rose. There was only a slight scraping astern. The schooner was squirming across as if quite well aware of what it meant if she stuck; and under a gust of wind that flattened Heddon against the wheel, she shook herself free, plunging nose down, even to her painted eyes.

Raeburn heaved in his line, coiled and threw the lead. He now had no lantern by which to scan the marking, and needed none, for he sang out:

"No bottom at seven—thank God!"

I

OLD Bill sent up a roar, a blasphemous roar, one that would have drawn a sermon out of him had any other man said as much.

"——strike me dead, the —— 'ooker's 'oo-dooed! I'm seein' ghosts! Wot the —— ——!"

The lantern burning in a bulkhead bracket down in the forecastle dimly outlined the scuttle; and as Barnes glanced that way he saw a form hastily leap the coaming and vanish into the darkness, then another, still another, and others, scrambling together, up and out as if the devil chased them.

He ran forward, lantern in hand, and swung the lantern up into the faces of frightened fellows, clustered together. They were stowaways who had been jarred from their hiding place by the schooner's grounding. With the crew's connivance they had been snugged down in the forepeak, but had bolted out on deck, expecting to find the schooner going to pieces on the rocks.

Old Bill yapped at them. Old Tom came up at a bandy-legged trot and took up the yapping. Adbul followed, for the simple, lonely half-giant had been taken under Old Tom's wing and was grateful; and Abdul growled at them like a proper bosun.

They were headed aft, with Old Bill talking as if stowaways were thieves. But one of their number spoke up, the fellow known on the beach as Pelew, who was loud of mouth and bold of eyes. He said angrily:

"Hold yer —— tongues. I won't be yelled at!" But the old shellbacks yapped the louder.

When they were brought aft, Heddon, who was in high good humor at getting over the bar, said:

"Why, Tom, it's part of the night's good luck. When we need men, here up they come, mumbo-jumbo out of darkness. I'll bet you that devil-worshipper Vioux, helped on by Grogan, is behind this magic. Turn-to! Brace in the fore—we've got the harbor's mouth to snap at us yet as we go by."

At sea one risk treads another's heels, and nothing seems safe but lying landlocked with all sail furled; even then hurricanes strike, hooks drag or cables part, and good stout ships have gone down at anchor. Night and day, at sea or moored, the shadow of unexpected disaster lies over the ship; and up come hazards, one on top the other, that even cautious men must take, so that the breath of danger, almost every hour, is upon the seaman asleep or awake; and this danger is the reason, more than any other, that youngsters flock to sea and shellbacks stay, for there is something strangely mad about Man, who is nothing stronger than a wadding of tender flesh wrapped along bones that crack easily; and this strange madness makes him like to pull the death's head whiskers for no more of a pleasure than seeing if he can dodge the death's head snap.

It was this harbor's mouth, with its tricky currents and coral, that made some skippers queasy even in daylight; but now the lords of luck seemed with the *Dragon*, and lightning, brighter than any sun, showed the way.

The schooner rushed on with the boldness of a lucky ship. The sound of breakers grew until for a long two minutes a shout would have been hardly better than a whisper about the deck; and men could see white water boiling up through the windward darkness, and they felt the swaying backwash of the breakers there. But the *Dragon* broke into the rip with sidelong lurching; the wind whistled on, and she bucked through to rolling water and settled into the nearly rhythmic heave and plunge that makes of a ship the seaman's cradle.

"It's simple, Jack, getting in and out of here," said Heddon in giving over the wheel to Raeburn. "You hit or you don't—that's all. Precautions and preparations are just little votive offerings we make to the great god luck. Two ships I know have been knocked into beachcombers' firewood here in daylight—an' we, on a night like this, stagger through blindly. Ho, there's been another come through, too! That Chink went out ahead of us. But take the wheel. I've got some real work now to do!"

Heddon stepped away, looked down through the skylight and paused. Below, Madame and Monsieur, reeling unsteadily from the roll of the deck, had much the posture of drunken persons and seemed to be quarreling. Heddon watched for a moment; a grin came and deepened at their gestural excitement. Then the grin vanished; he looked forward into the darkness and called—

"Grogan!"

II

MADAME and Monsieur were quarreling.

"——fool of a woman! Have I not told you she is not on the ship? He did not bring her. You say over and over to me, "Monsieur, where is Po-Shu?' I do not know! But do I not want her as much as you! Why give me the blame? He did not bring her, that Heddon!"

"Monsieur, is it that you are trying to make me believe that Po-Shu is not on this ship?"

"*Nom de Dieu!* Is there no sense in a woman! What I have said I have said!"

"So, monsieur, you have lost my Po-Shu?"

"I talk to three fools in one petticoat! He did not keep his promise! But he shall pay. We have lost Po-Shu, but we have him. He has diamonds—whole handfuls. Men saw them in his hands. That will pay something!"

"But we have lost Po-Shu?" said Madame with the persistence of a woman who has a man at a disadvantage and will not change the subject.

"Pest of a woman, you! You knew the plan! You said to me, 'It is good, Julien!' But he did not bring her as he promised, so now you say to me—'It is your fault, Vioux!' "

"Certainly," said Madame. "I do not want reasons why plans fails. I want Po-Shu, monsieur."

"Have reason, madame!"

"Monsieur, I do not forget that at those times when Po-Shu needed to be taught certain things a stupid girl should know, then you would say—'Have reason, madame! Have mercy!' Ah, how is it I can know you did not plan for the magistrate to take Po-Shu from me, and even for Chinamen to steal her? She was young, monsieur. Often you called her pretty. Yours is such a tender heart. You helped her escape, eh?"

"May you die in pain! *Gadoue!*"

Madame's eyes flashed, but calmly she said—

"You call me street-mud?"

"Name of holy blood, I call you what I call you! There is no name to name a woman fool! What a man could do I have done. Is it then my fault that—"

"You, monsieur, call me street-mud?"

"*Nom de Dieu*, yes! I call you street-mud. I call you wormy turnip! I call you—no! I do not call you anything, for there are no words."

Madame could swear like a rag-picker, but now she was in no mood for swearing. It pleased her to be unreasonable with him since the wisest way of treating men is to keep them humble, to give them much blame, and to seem to believe nothing that they say, lest they be encouraged to lie more than usual.

"So," said Madame, "you call me street-mud? I, who pulled you by the leg from a sewer-prison, am street-mud! You call everybody bad names. Even the brave Monsieur Heddon. Zut. Po-Shu is lost. You are a little card swindler who returns what you steal if men show anger."

"Brave Monsieur Heddon, indeed! We shall see how brave. Ho, it is arranged."

"You arrange much, and it comes to no good end. Where is Po-Shu?"

"Ah, ask the brave Monsieur Heddon! He did not bring her."

"I ask you," said Madame. "What have I to do with monsieur? You I told to get back my Po-Shu! Now you talk of something else arranged."

"But you know all of what is arranged. It pleases you to be unreasonable. You talked with the Grogan ashore, and said—Good! We have lost Po-Shu who might have got pimples on her skin and become worthless. Let us now take what fortune has given us and make no complaints. Forgive a stupid anger. I spoke without meaning a word. We can make this Heddon pay for—"

"Do not touch me! I am street-mud! Back with you, monsieur!"

"But sweet Lucille, I—"

"Three fools in one petticoat! The wormy turnip! *Mademoiselle Gadoue!* Back from me!"

"Though you are a woman, show some sense! This Heddon has treasure and—"

"The treasure of a brave heart and big fists!" said Madame. "You saw! Your bladder-head, it poked out from the pantry when you heard the noise of the fight. Ah, he is savage in the fight! Between two fingers he could crack you, so. Just as if you were a louse. At times you are nothing more. Street-mud, I! Indeed!"

"But he did not bring Po-Shu!"

"When I had seen Monsieur Heddon in the fight, I knew he had done what he could to get Po-Shu. Brave men do not lie, monsieur."

"How you talk! One would think he was already your good friend! What has he to admire so much?"

Madame shrugged her shapely shoulders and said:

"Big hard fists, little card-sharper! And the look in the eye that makes men fear him."

"Bah! I have no fear of him!"

"Try to show him so," said Madame, "and he will break your head like the empty eggshell that it is!"

"You do not think that! I am terrible when angered. And what can he do, since there are more men on this ship than he knows? Both those and his crew have joined with us. And who, madame, who was it that made these plans so carefully?"

"Myself," said Madame with composure.

"It was I! You, you knew nothing until today on shore I brought the Grogan to talk to you. I—I—it was I! And now you—"

"Shhh-hh-h! Some one is coming. It is the Grogan!"

III

GROGAN came down the companion. He glanced anxiously from Madame to Vioux and looked as if he wanted to say something in a quick whisper; but Heddon was at his heels.

Grogan breathed noisily; rain trickled down his bristly cheeks like sweat. His cheeks were pouched with fat; he had fat at his waist line too. His eyes sat deep and cunning under red brows, and their gaze flitted anxiously from Vioux to Madame. With an air of honest blurting he got out—

"Oi told him as how Oi'm afther joinin' wid yez for the fun ov travelin' a bit, but—"

"And I told you to keep your mouth shut!"

"Shure—" this with a kind of vicious humbleness—"an' the wurd ov an hones' man does no harm, Misther Heddon."

"Another word, honest or otherwise, an' I'll break your —— neck!"

Grogan avoided Heddon's look by letting the roll of the vessel nearly shake him off his feet, so he staggered back, reaching out for something to steady himself.

Heddon eyed Vioux up and down, then as if there was no mistaking the more important person, turned his back on Vioux and spoke to Madame:

"See here. I smell too much sulphur and brimstone. The devil's aboard. What's up?"

"Monsieur speaks a reeddle! If monsieur can say more plain what eet is zat—"

"All right. Grogan stowed away, and you knew it—"

She glanced contemptuously at Grogan, suspecting that he had said so.

"—and this yarn about him joining your freaks for a bit of travel—"

"Artists, monsieur! Artists!" said Vioux, trying to get himself noticed as of some importance.

"—won't hold water," said Heddon. "So I've tumbled him below here to have it out. Also I find five more men stowed away. That your work too? You goin' to seize the ship or something? Out with it!"

Madame shrank ever so slightly, lifted her shoulders in the suggestion of a shiver, and said:

"Oo-o, monsieur speaks wiz so much, so ver' much anger. He frightens me. He is so saveege!"

"Frighten you? Any man? Not much! There's nothing to scare a woman that wraps that —— snake about her."

"My babee!" said Madame sharply, then smiled. "An' so geentle. So ver' *affectionne.* He is not like a man, but alwiz so ver' geentle."

"You're doing a lot of talking, but you don't answer," said Heddon, and his frown held a warning that she regarded attentively. "And if you think you can wri gle out of answering—try it! Grogan'll go into irons, and you, all you, will be clapped under the hatch! What about it?"

Madame's smile was disarming. She spoke, as if speaking to him, but in French; then asked:

"Do you understan' ze compliment zat I give to you, monsieur?"

Heddon answered by reaching about and catching hold of Vioux, then with a hustling jerk moved him away from the stairs, and with a rough push sent him near the bulkhead beside Grogan, and said—

"Stay there, where I can keep more of an eye on you."

Madame regarded him with an amazement that was not entirely unfriendly—

"Ah! You speak French!"

"Enough to know you told Vioux to get the other men down here, somehow, to handle me. So you mean to seize this ship, eh? Well, why?"

"Marveelous man, you!" She laughed in a kind of friendly mockery at his frown. "So—how you say eet? Pen-ee-trative, eh? Ver' well, monsieur, I will tell you, so! All ze sailors, ze men too zat you fin' hide away, Grogan here, an' Monsieur, myself too, haf the opeenion, monsieur, zat you mus' take us to zat island where your hid treasure is an'—"

Heddon's glower broke into a grin; he eyed Grogan and laughed; to Vioux he said:

"So that's why you added a wild Irishman to your freaks. His plan, wasn't it?" Then— "See here, madam—"

"*Madame*," she corrected amiably, but with firmness.

"All right, madame. But see here, if I knew of treasure would I bang and bat about in these islands, stealing shell an' doing a tramp's odd jobs, when with little more than the glint of gold one could live at ease in, say Paris? Grogan's been a fool over that treasure yarn. You've caught madness from him like the smallpox. If there'd been a smell of treasure, I'd have dug for it long ago. You're a fine lot of cutthroats. Grogan, on deck with you an' forward! Jump to it an' no back talk. Get up there!"

Heddon moved toward him, and in balancing himself to the roll of the ship Heddon's movement was like a lurch. Grogan threw up an arm protectively, and swallowed down words that wanted to say Heddon lied in saying he knew nothing of treasure.

"Get up there!" Heddon repeated.

Grogan's bristly red face grew more red, and there was the look of a snarl on his mouth, but the only sound he made was from the shuffling stamp of his feet on the ladder as his backward glance tried to tell Madame not to be fooled.

Heddon would have followed, but Madame touched his arm restrainingly and said:

"But ze Walscher agent, monsieur? Ah! He tell people zat you tol' heem there was treasure. An' ze diamonds, monsieur? Ze beeg handful of diamonds, eh?"

"Diamonds?" Heddon grinned jeeringly at her.

"Ah—" Madame had an air of friendly triumph, but triumph—"Ah, so many!"—She held out her cupped hands, indicating handfuls— "Zey were seen by people in ze town. Why is eet zat you haf not gone wiz them to, ah, say Paris, eh?"

"So that's it!"

Heddon thrust a hand into the pocket of his wet trousers, drew out the chamois bag, held it up.

Vioux's eyes brightened hungrily, then darted in an alarmed glance at Madame, but she seemed to notice nothing familiar as Heddon pulled open the mouth of the bag. He spilled the broken glass into his palm and thrust his palm under Vioux's nose.

Vioux with a grabbing gesture put up his soft small hands, holding Heddon's palm; and with a forefinger he gingerly poked the bright bits and chips that for a second had looked to him like jewels. Then Vioux made a choking sound and dropped his hands.

Madame, moving quickly, had come close and peered; her frown was intent; there was a moment's rigid bend to her body as if she meant to snatch.

"*Sacré*, monsieur!" She stepped back, frowning. "Thees is glass!"

"I sailed with a fellow once that used French pearls, used them to swindle swindling storekeepers and such. That gave me the idea. An' I've no more wealth than the timbers under your feet, no more treasure than these bits of a broken gin bottle!"

But Madame hardly listened. At that moment, without a word, she put out her hand inquiringly to the chamois bag; and as she took it, Vioux stepped back with a movement like the beginning of flight.

"Thees, where did you get thees, monsieur?"

"It came with the diamond I bargained out of Vioux. To make it look like I had a handful, I mixed in glass."

She gave Vioux a quick sidelong look as if to make sure that he was still there, had not sneaked off; then, very quietly:

"Julien, he gave you a diamond, monsieur? Where is eet, please?"

"This ship was libeled. I bought her off."

"Zat diamond was mine, monsieur!"

"Yours or the Devil's, it was all the same to me."

"You knew, monsieur, zat it was stole from me?"

"Stolen, yes. To look at him, I'd guess that. Who from, why should I care? I had to get this ship clear. And do you think I'd manhandle a magistrate, and turn this ship over to you for nothing?"

"But ze money—he pay you? I give heem money to pay you! Zat diamond eet is worth ten ol' sheeps like thees!"

"*Nom de Dieu!*" said Vioux with explosive indignation, rattling away in French to wriggle clear of Madame's anger. "He demanded more than we could offer, and said pay we must or he would tell the magistrate! Sacred blood! I tell the truth! It was necessity, and what must be given must be given. He promised Po-Shu! He promised not to sell the diamond! All would have come out well but for his lies! We would have taken the diamond from him here on this ship. Nothing would have been lost! I meant to restore it to your hiding place and all would have been well. Ah, Lucille, believe me! I did not steal it! I took it quietly to save you the worry of fear that it would be lost. He, miserable scoundrel, would have told the magistrate if I had not got the diamond to give him. But I had it arranged to get the best of him. I swear the truth in God's name!"

Madame's shapely shoulders were set rigidly; she held her head high; her arms were crossed, and she spoke without giving Vioux so much as the shadow of a glance:

"Monsieur Hed-don, thees man for many years I haf fed an' give his clothes because bad luck made heem my—what you call eet?—steep—step-brother. Ze police did me ze kindness to put heem into preeson, but I was ze fool woman to get heem out. I work. I save. I speend much money to get heem out. Now ze las' diamond zat I haf, he steal eet from me! My hands"—she suited her gestures to the word—"I now wash my hands from heem! I can not make heem an hones' man. Oh ze years I haf tried! He not only steal my diamond from me, but monsieur, he meant to steal eet from you back. Nevare again will I trus' heem—nevare! I wash my hands! He is a stranger! So dishones'! Monsieur, I will tell you about heem an' all zat I haf done to—"

Vioux had his mouth half open and his dainty fingers fumbled with the tuft on his chin as he stared at Madame and wondered whether Madame was in earnest or merely laying her cards to play a trick on this Heddon.

At that moment a sudden uproar broke out on the deck above; there was a trampling rush of feet, surprized angered voices that mingled oaths in explosive shouts; there was fall of bodies and the floundering thump of bodies struggling together after the fall.

Heddon, at first sound of fighting, jumped for the ladder.

IV

HEDDON, when he sent Grogan up the ladder, had meant to follow; but Grogan, with a backward glance, saw that he was not being followed, and then looked about the deck with a half furtive anxiety in which there was a kind of resolution, as when a timid thief is determined to take the risk.

It was still raining; the wet wind blew with a long breath, and the schooner lay deep to leeward, but being light ballasted rocked a bit jerkily. The night clouds were trimmed with sheet lightning. But for Raeburn, Grogan was alone aft.

"Is it yezself, Jack?" Grogan called, peering.

"No," said Raeburn, not liking the evil eagerness in Grogan's voice. "No. I'm drunk ashore. Wish I was!"

"Where are the ould gran'dads, bhoy?"

"Up at the galley, boiling yesterday's dishwater for tonight's coffee. But they've got more than coffee. Don't you hear 'em singing. They'll give you a drop. Go ask 'em!"

What Raeburn had called singing was loud wrangling that could be heard but indistinctly. Voices, not words, came aft.

The shellbacks had pawed about searchingly, and had been fortunate enough to uncover a bottle or two of gin in the forecastle just when it seemed fitting to celebrate, this chill windy wet night, their great good luck in jumping the sand bar and in getting safely out of the harbor on a stormy tide. The hot breath of liquor was the nearest thing to worldly-warmth that gave their old bones ease from the ache of work, and gave them that feeling of peace rich men have; or that the poor think other men must have, being rich.

Grogan came near to Raeburn and said:

"Are ye wid us, Jack?"

"With you? What's up?"

"Lissen, bhoy! The crew an' me mates as Oi got hid aboard, though bad luck scairt 'em up bayfore all was ready! We're afther seizin' the ship an' makin' Heddon, —— his soul to the Black Pit, lay his course straight f'r thot threasure island. 'Tis settled. All aboard are in wid us but them ould gran'dads. An' ye're a loikely bhoy—what yez say, Jack?"

"Holy Judas, Grogan! He knows of no treasure. It's all a joke!"

"Joke be —— to ye! Ye've lied to me them many toimes have ye? Yez are lyin' now! He do know of threasure, an' foind it f'r us he will, or dance wid his neck in a hempen collar. He's dealin' wid Pat Grogan now! That wart ov a Vioux an' his mizzus 'll learn what a rale seaman is bayfore they see land agin'. Pat Grogan is runnin' ov this ship from now on, an' he's" —Grogan pointed below—"been a'ready told as much. Knows he ain't got a chanct. There be three toimes as many ov us as yez. An' Oi had a loikin' f'r ye, Jack, but now to —— wid yez—sayin' there ain't no threasure!"

He turned hurriedly, paused at the skylight, looked below, scowled, then went forward.

Raeburn could not leave the wheel for, if he did, the schooner would fly up into the wind, go aback, and with light ballasted roll strike on beams' end, capsize or be dismasted. He stamped on the deck, but the stamping made no sound for he was barefooted, having taken off his soggy shoes. He called as loud as he dared, but Heddon did not hear.

He was about to chance letting the wheel spin while he made a jump for the pin rail and get something with which to hammer the deck, but heard voices coming and saw a lantern.

Old Tom and Old Bill were coming aft; Abdul was with them, and other men behind. Lightning winked through the darkness; with the lightning and by the lantern Tom carried, Raeburn saw cups in their hands, and a gin bottle.

Old Tom's voice rose shrilly

"—the Irish'r better than the English—"

"Not 'uman bein's, they ain't!"

"—an' us Dutchmen is best of all!" Tom chanted. "Ain't we Abdul?"

"Sufferin' the pain wot I do," said Bill, "ary man but me'd be coiled down in 'is 'ammock, groanin'. But Job 'e teached—"

"Tom!" Raeburn called. "Tom, come here!"

"Hear that sucklin' babe," said Old Tom, easing himself on the skylight for a bench. "Hear that sucklin' babe, cryin' for the bottle—gin bottle!"

"Come here—" Raeburn yelled, and swore demandingly.

"Such langwige!" said Old Bill.

"You drunken fools! Get Heddon up here quick! There's trouble brewin'! Get him—"

From among the men that had bunched aft, Grogan at that moment pushed through and spoke up to Tom. Grogan saw that the time had come for Raeburn was giving warning, or trying to; and Tom, who sat on the skylight, tin cup in hand, the lantern on the deck between his feet, was staring across his shoulder with sobering thoughtfulness, for though he knew the boy was full of tricks, there was the sound of honest anxiety in his voice; but Tom couldn't see anything to be anxious about. Grogan, pushing close, began with:

"Oi'll have a wurd wid yez! This ship—"

"Shut up!" said Tom to Grogan. But feeling too good to be angry, Tom said: "Abdul! As bosun, pipe all hands aft to choose the watch. Me, I'll choose Grogan. Ugly men make handsome sailors!"

Grogan yelled, giving the signal for the fight; and as he yelled he swung up from behind him a belaying pin and struck at Tom.

Tom's gin, cup and fist all went flying up into Grogan's face, and his other fist followed. Men closed in with arms swinging.

Somebody overturned Old Bill, who gropingly encircled an armful of legs and brought down men on top of him; and these seemed to mistake one another for enemies as they floundered on the slippery deck.

Raeburn yelled for Heddon. Some one thought he made too much noise. A shadowy form leaped at him, struck glancingly against his upraised arm, then again. Raeburn collapsed, and with the reeling heave of the schooner sprawled forward and lay still as the wheel spun free.

V

HEDDON, coming up on deck, paused for an instant, half blindly peering into the darkness, and threw a questioning shout at where he thought Raeburn stood before he saw beyond the glow of the binnacle light that the spokes were spinning with no hand on them.

He jumped for the wheel, stumbling over Raeburn as he went. With a loose helm, the *Dragon* would yaw, and under that spread of canvas, founder; so Heddon turned this way and that, as if caged, while the fight went on.

He thought the row must be a drunken jumble, though he could hear Grogan's voice yelling: "Down wid 'im!" Heddon could not believe that this was a fight to seize the ship, for Raeburn was already out, and that pack should have had no trouble in putting down the two old shellbacks; yet their voices too could be heard.

"Down wid 'im!"

"Kill the ——!"

"—— the ——!" That was Old Bill, the pious.

"Down the ——!"

"Yi-ee!" Old Tom yelled as if sounding a battle cry.

Forms surged and flashed vaguely in the skylight's glow; now a shape darted through, contortionate with haste, now an arm swung up as if bodiless and vanished as it struck. Squirming bodies milled together across the rain-washed patch of light and became for a moment lost in the darkness, but there remained the sound of trampling, confused oaths and cries, curses for some one. Old Bill answered blasphemously. Tom's yelp had the sound of triumph.

"To —— with this!" said Heddon, glancing aloft and to windward.

He drew his pocket knife, opened the blade, then jumped away and made a reaching slash at the mainsail.

The mainsail, stabbed, ripped explosively, like a tight-blown bladder at a pin prick; and on the instant nearly half of the *Dragon's* canvas was off her. It was a hazardous, expensive, desperate thing to do, for enough canvas remained aloft to wreck the schooner; but better a wreck than successful mutiny.

He threw down the knife and snatched at the pin rail. Heavy wood did more than short steel in laying men out.

A cluster of grappling bodies stumbled out of the darkness and brought up against the raised skylight, with a man or two scrambling backward for footing on the slope of its iron grating.

Arms writhed overhead and fell, striking across shoulders at some one who was completely hemmed in, yet staggered upright with all that weight against him.

With jerk at collar and swing of pin, Heddon laid men out, jerking them aside as he struck. Men sensed this danger from the rear as the fellow by their side would drop, and began to break away, backing off. Leaving Abdul there with some man locked in his arms.

Heddon lurched forward with arm upraised, meaning to floor the Human Bull in a way that would serve for the rest of the voyage; but from somewhere out of the scrimmage, Old Tom came up gropingly by the skylight, snatched at Heddon's arm; yelled:

"Don't ye! He's with us! 'T was him they couldn't down!

Abdul, no longer hemmed in by the weight of men that struck him, beat him, tried to put him down, half turned in a crouch, and turning, brought Grogan's face into view. Grogan's eyes bulged from the pressure of the hand at his throat, and his hands were clamped on Abdul's wrist, pulling futilely. His mouth was open, but he could not make a sound. Abdul, half stooping, changed his hold, and raising, lifted Grogan, took a step forward, threw him bodily across the skylight and into the darkness beyond.

Abdul's head was battered; blood covered his shoulders. He grunted hoarsely, satisfied; and in facing about for the next to grab, saw Heddon, eyed him, then crouched massively with hands extended and open in the manner of a wrestler.

"I can beadt you! You now vill I kill, *schweinhund!*"

"For one swipe at me," Old Tom yelled, "Abdul fought 'em all! Now what's—"

The schooner had fallen back into the trough of a sea, and now with crashing flop of canvas swayed over, buried her rail and shunted every man of them across the deck; they went staggering, tumbling, sliding as down the slant of a roof, raising cries as they went. Men, half swimming, brought up against the bulwarks, grasping shrouds and stays, clinging to the loose end of any line. The foremast, with splintering crack, snapped half-way up; jib and foresail, with loose bellying flourishes and loud flap, came down with the broken mast that crashed the stowed whaleboat, splintering it into firewood. The top weight was off the schooner. Much of the raffle lay adrift, half on deck, half overboard; and the chafing and jerk of the fallen mast, snarled in a tangle of rigging, had the sound of something chewing bones.

VI

THE schooner was a wreck, with all boats gone, and lay with a lopsided list. Frightened men scrambled about, anxiously asking one to another—

"Will she sink?"

"Hope she does!" said Heddon for the bitter pleasure of making men more uneasy.

He pawed about, looking for young Raeburn, who had been unconscious. Heddon loved the lazy young rascal as a younger brother, and friends were far too rare in his embittered life to forget one even at a time when his ship had gone to smash.

He pulled the half drowned boy out of the scupper much as one picks up old wet clothes that have gone adrift, and carried him down into the cabin.

Descending there, Heddon paused and half forgot that he had the lad in his arms as he looked and listened, utterly astonished.

Madame and Vioux were there, again, as usual, quarreling. Denasso was there, indolently listening. Zudag the negro was there, sleek and unscratched, not having put his head above the coaming. Abdul was there, dripping blood from head to waist, and his square head wholly befuddled. He stood in an attitude of sullen humbleness.

Vioux was enraged that through Abdul's blundering Grogan and his men had got their heads cracked and their tails kicked.

Abdul, almost humbly, had said that he was sorry he had been on the wrong side in the deck fight; not sorry he was bruised and battered, or had nearly killed the Grogan, "who hadt no —— pizness to hidt mein liddle friendt;" but, apologetically to Madame, "Dot —— Heddon, him I vud kill mit bleasure! I didt nod know der ge-fight vas over him!"

And Madame abused not Abdul, but Vioux:

"You, Vioux, are more than a bad thief! You are a big fool! One look should have made you know it were better to be friends with Monsieur Heddon than the tool of the stupid Grogan. Monsieur Bladder-Head, I am through with you. You have no luck. Though you are a liar, you lie badly and convince no one. You would steal from God if he pardoned you into Heaven! Away from me! Go to your Grogan!"

Then, such is the erratic unreason of woman that she, with those slim firm hands of hers that had so often gesticulated in wrath at Abdul, now stroked his bleeding shoulders. When Heddon entered the cabin she was praising Abdul, saying he was a brave man and had saved the ship. She told her lazy, sullen negro Zudag to take Abdul away, to wash and bind his wounds.

Abdul, who had been through enough to kill three men, was glad to be led half blindly away and waited on; but his head throbbed with such puzzlement that this troubled him more than the pain. And he could not talk about it to Zudag, for the negro could talk no English and Abdul would not talk French, which was thicker in his mouth than English, so he lay stolidly in the bunk, which was too small for him, while the negro washed Abdul's body, clipped away hair, applied oil, and bound his head with so many bandages that Abdul looked more like a Hindu than a Turk.

Madame gave a start at seeing Heddon, who had stood unnoticed in the cabin, then she fluttered with a Samaritan eagerness toward Raeburn, whose head was broken, his body limply wet, and his mouth hung open like one who had died in fright. She called him "Poor boy!" bent and pulled at his lids to see how glazed were his eyes, told Denasso to open her door, told Heddon to lay him there on her bed, that she would bring life into him.

"What's flopped you over?" asked Heddon, who did not trust her.

"When I see zat Vioux had stole my diamond, I hate heem—thees time I hate heem forever!"

"But," asked Heddon jeeringly, "my great hid treasure, how're you going to make me dig that up?"

"I haf learned somesing," said Madame, lifting her head high and looking at him with a kind of defiant frankness. "You may not know of treasure, but if you do, thees beeg fools could not take eet from you!"

She turned on Vioux so fiercely, with such menace in her gestures, that he, bewildered and frightened, withdrew nearly headlong into the pantry.

"Now, monsieur, zat poor boy! Put heem here!"

Raeburn was stirring like a restless dreamer. Heddon thought that a sick man was the better off in the hands of a woman, any woman, even a bad one, than under the care of men; for if women may be more cruel than men, they also have the touch of tenderness that is lacking in men, even the best of men. Besides, Heddon wanted to get back on deck and have a look at the damage.

So he put Raeburn in Madame's narrow bunk and went out, leaving Denasso there too.

Heddon no sooner was gone than Madame sent Denasso away, and, shutting the door, fastened the latch.

VII

THE men of the *Dragon* that night, or at least the crew and stowaways, were like wet and wingless flies, and crawled about the deck, waiting for the dawn.

"—— two-legged insects," said Heddon. "That's what men are. The gods tore off men's wings as boys do flies. Tore 'em off to make us eager for the promise that wings will be restored in Heaven—if an insect can crawl so high."

There was one fellow among them who didn't crawl; that was Pelew, so called because he had at one time talked much of adventures and misdeeds in the Pelew Islands. He had the squat build of an ape and bold eyes.

He walked up with a half-friendly boldness to where Heddon stood and said with odd frankness:

"Nothin' left to fight for, mister, but a dismasted tub as won't sail. Shippin' passes this way. Tomorrer we'll all be took off an' have to lie like —— to that pot-bellied magistrate."

"You will, all right," said Heddon. "I'm going to put a charge of piracy against you fellows." Heddon knew very well that he could not put a charge of anything against anybody, since he, having assaulted the magistrate, was beyond the law's protection. "Try to seize a ship on the high seas!"

"Me," said Pelew, unalarmed, "I'll turn Crown's witness an' let Grogan swing. Deserves it, the blasted fool. Bungle his job so. Now me, mister, if I'd been in charge, you wouldn't ha' got off so easy. Where is Grogan? I'll go tell 'im so!"

Pelew turned away, and went about calling and looking for Grogan; but could not find him. He was never found; and the best guess that men could make was that when the schooner had gone aback and heeled rail-deep, Grogan had gone overboard; perhaps, half unconscious, he had gone floundering out into the darkness without a cry. There were none who cared. His plan had failed.

The sailors huddled about Old Tom when he sounded the well, and they bent forward to in the lantern's light to read the water mark.

He called: "All the ol' leaks got their mouths open, Will. Three foot o' water in her belly. How about the pump?"

"Why pump to save a crew of pirates?" said Heddon.

"Aye," Tom answered readily. "Better we sink than hang!"

Men, full of sudden interest in their lives, pressed out of shadows and questioned Old Bill, whose resigned air of unconcern troubled them rather than reassured; he said she might live through the night or fill sudden-like; that she was old, and years before had been sold by men who were afraid of her leaks; that it was pounding her rump on the bar that had opened her timbers.

"Me," said the crafty hypocrite, " 'avin' a religious nater, I b'lieve in mir'cles. Pumpin' won't do no good if 'E wants to sink 'er!"

Old Bill, though he did not have great faith in the ability of the *Dragon* to leak yet keep afloat, did not want to pump; he wanted other men to pump.

These other men, with growing anxiety, came to where Heddon stood with feet wide apart and arms folded near the wheel that spun with rattling jar; and by the light of the binnacle they could see his face frown at them when they said their lives were precious, and if they could keep afloat by pumping they would.

"No use," Heddon told them. "Waste o' strength. Water's too deep an' will gain on you. Besides, you wanted treasure. The sea bottom's strewn with coral-'crusted jewels—"

"One boat is smashed, the other's lost! We can't make a raft—we got to pump—"

" 'R swim," said Old Bill with composure, seating himself on the skylight and taking out his pipe.

"She is feelin' loggy—I c'n feel 'er!"

"Pumpin' won't do no harm. We'll pump!"

"Won't do no good neither," said Old Bill, prodding the bowl of his pipe with a thumb. " 'Avin' that sarpent on board means we gotter sink. Pumpin' won't do no good till some o' you fellers go down an' 'eave it hout a port 'ole. But me, I'd sooner drown peac'bly 'an try sech a thing."

"There can't be no danger, him talking that away!" said one.

"W'y," said another anxiously, "can't yer feel her rollin' stiff an' deep! She will sink!"

"Mister," said Pelew, "we're goin' pump. I'll kick 'em there, an' chain 'em there, an' brain 'em if they stop to breathe!"

"As you like," said Heddon.

"Won't do no good," Old Bill muttered sadly.

Some one of the crew had wiped the rod and himself sounded the well to see just how deep the water was. Rain was falling; and whether it was rain water or bilge, he raised the clamorous alarm that there was near four feet of water in the hold.

Heddon, Old Tom and Bill presently stood together listening to the clank, clank, clank of the pump and the sobbing gush of water.

"Talk o' coral-'crusted treaser is awright," said Tom, "f'r the fun o' scarin' them to the pump, but come daylight, what's to be done? Jury-rigged an' water-logged we'd sail like Dutchmen an' git nowhere."

" 'Ave faith, Tom. That's wot!"

"In what?"

"Mir'cles. I seen 'em. Lots of 'em."

Tom swore at him, saying—

"You never!"

"Ho yes, ho yes," Bill replied with exasperating assurance. "I leave it to you as 'ow there's jus' been one. Makin' men beg to pump ship. I'm an ol' man, Tom. Older nor you, Tom. An' I never see a bigger un."

"That ain't no miracle. That's a joke, you ol' hyp—"

"Now now, Tom! No 'arsh nymes on a night like this. Be thoughtful, lad, of your wicked past."

"Don't ye talk that way to me! I won't have it. Heaven mus' be a —— of a place if they let in fellers like you."

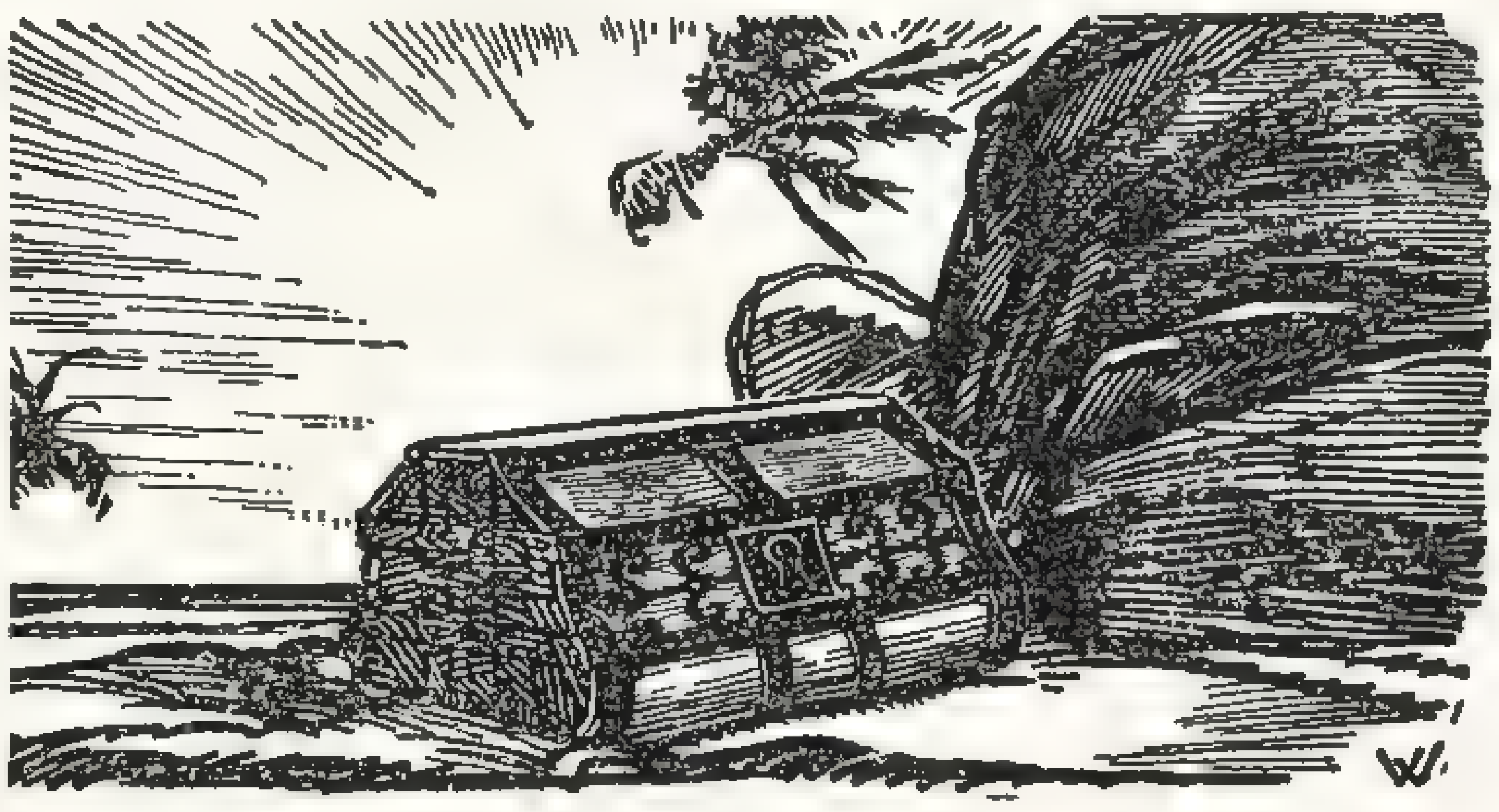
"Me, leanin' on the parypets, mug in 'and, I'll look—"

"Shut up!"

"An' wot's the good o' life, Tom, if there ain't no 'Eaven for us as allus tries—"

"I," said Heddon, "am going below to make sure the witch woman hasn't fed Jack to her snake."

So Heddon left the shellbacks wrangling over miracles, the good and bad of life, and what a man could hope for in the end.



WHEN Raeburn had opened his eyes he was shivering and his head ached.

Madame sat facing him on the bunk, and was rubbing his hands, chafing to stir the blood. Though he was too dazed to notice closely, too young to have been suspicious even if he had noticed, there was a tense look in her black eyes that was not kindly, not inimical, but coolly shrewd, calculating.

She spoke French, quick inflectional words with play of smiles.

He shook his head, then grabbed at his head. It ached and seemed monstrously enlarged. He fumbled at the bandage. Madame held up her mirror. His head was bound with a red sash, loop on loop, and the tassels dangled.

He sat up, asking what had happened.

"Ah, zey fighted wiz Monsieur Heddon, an' he beat zem! So ze sheep sail on an' on, like before."

"Don't feel like it," said Raeburn, pausing a moment to sense the sluggish roll of the schooner. "I'm goin' get up an'—"

He pushed at the bed covering to scramble out, but in giving a glance toward the deck he was frozen rigidly. The python was sprawled in tangled coils on the deck about Madame's feet. Raeburn's eyes filled with fright.

"Haf no fear. He is ver' geentle an'—"

"What's he doin' out?"

"Oh, zat leetle box give heem ze cramp! He is my pet. My—how you say *joujou?*—my ah, play-toy. Zat's eet!"

"Won't he bite?"

"Bite? Heem? Nice boy like you? Oh no, no, no. Nevare."

"He's lookin' right at me!"

"Ah, he is a beeg babee an' likes to see ever'sing."

"It'd be awful if I'd been drinkin'."

"Nice boy like you, Jacques, he should nevare drink. An' now you mus' tell me about Captain Heddon an'—"

"Nothing to tell. He's one o' the finest men in the world, but all the treasure talk—he knows nothing about treasure!"

"Why care about zat?" she inquired as if gold and jewels were of no importance. "He has ze treasure of a brave heart. So beeg! So ver' strong! He has ze look—" she frowned in imitation of Heddon's glowering—"zat make men afraid. He love you, eh? Ho, an' I, I too love you. I haf ze great admiration for heem. Oh ver' great. You mus' tell me of heem."

"He hates women!" Raeburn blurted.

"So do I," said Madame, nodding approval.

"All women," he protested.

"One man zat is ver' wise."

"An' he's poor as a crab."

"Ze brave man is alwiz reech, Monsieur Jacques!"

"But you don't understand about him!"

"Zen you mus' tell me more, leetle Jacques."

"Aw don't call me that!"

"Eet is your name. Jack eet is a ver' ugly name. Now you tell me, Jacques, why Monsieur Heddon do not like women, eh?"

"I don't know. He's queer that way," said Raeburn, who did not at all share in the prejudice against women.

"You sink so bold man like heem—maybe he like ze woman to be bold too? Is zat eet, maybe?"

"Bold? What you mean?"

"I mean do ze brave deed. Do ze brave clevar sing. Have ze courage too, like heem. I haf ze admiration for heem zat he tie gags to ze ol' magistrate to steal Po-Shu. Ah, would he haf admiration for ze woman who did somesing like zat, eh?"

"Why—why anybody would!" said Raeburn, who was young.

There was the clatter of a fist on Madame's door.

"Who is eet?" she asked unfriendly, her tone so sharp and hard that Raeburn gave a start as if this were another woman speaking.

"Heddon!"

"Ah," she called, her voice now smoothly pleasant. "Ah, monsieur, one leetle minute—"

Heddon jerked the door, a sliding door, from its lock; and Raeburn shouted—

"Look out, Will! Look out!"

"Haf ze care! Do not enter, monsieur!"

Heddon paused with a start in the very movement of lifting a foot to enter. He drew back. An oath of surprize spilled itself on his lips, and his hand reached out to the door to slam it shut. The deck within seemed covered with snake, loose loop on loop of snake, all moving slowly with a slithering rustle.

"What's that —— thing doing out?" said Heddon.

Madame's was a sparkling smile, tinted with a little pleasure that the big brave man should be uneasy.

"Will, I want out!" said Raeburn.

"You are seek!" said Madame.

Heddon made a sound something like laughter as he looked at Raeburn, who sat on the bunk, chilled and frightened, his head bound with a red sash that had tassels.

"Jack, have you joined the circus, too? Good freak you make. You an' that apeman Pelew."

"I want out!" said Raeburn.

"Poor seek leetle Jacques," said Madame, putting out a hand to stroke him, but he pushed away her hand.

"Jacques!" Heddon repeated, jeeringly. "So that's your stage name, eh?" Then, with feeling toward the snake, "Get back there, you!"

The python, having hung motionless, now with slow squirming moved forward toward the doorway, and Heddon, having told the snake to get back, himself stepped back, well back.

The python, with a slow weaving crawl, shifting slightly with the deck's roll, stirred its length of body, now with head up and forward, now with head settling back motionlessly on its curved neck as if watching. The eyes seemed like bits of onyx, all-seeing and motionless.

Madame watched not the serpent, but Heddon who looked at it with fascination and dread, and moved back with distrust.

"I'd rather meet the Devil on a dark night," said Heddon. "What a thing!"

"Booteeful, monsieur! Ze rhythm, how perfect! Ze body, so sinuous, like ze love of woman! You fear woman, monsieur?"

"Yes," said Heddon with a hard glance at her. "All snakes, I'm afraid of. No understanding 'em." Then watching the python, "What a chill the look of that thing can give a fellow!"

"You should see heem in anger, monsieur! Ze mouth eet is open, ze breath hiss-ss-s! Like ze poison! Ze body twist, zis way, zat! Eet straighten—a flash, monsieur, an' zen ze strongest man zat lives, he cry out, an' die. In anger, Oo-o terrible! Monsieur, what you do, eh, if I take zis—" she drew a long hairpin, like a tiny-bladed dagger—"an' I preek heem, so! You, ze stranger, he think you do it to hurt heem, an' he hiss—with mouth open, he raise up an'—what you do, eh?"

"Run," said Heddon.

Madame laughed softly in a way that made Heddon like her less than ever; her hard eyes seemed serpent's eyes, cruel, hard as black stone, treacherous. He looked from her face to the snake's motionless head, and back again; and he, being imaginative, decided that the same sort of soul looked out of both their eyes.

Madame sank the bodkin into the coiled depth of her fine, thick black hair, and stepping carefully, bent down by the python's head. It drew back, turned this way and that, as if avoiding her hands, and she moved her hands slowly as if with great care not to make a grabbing gesture. She spoke to it as to a wilful child, and her voice fell into a low humming, like a sort of chant in which the words were muffled. She stroked the thing from its head down along its neck with long gentle movements, and in the stroking turned it toward the large green box. Her motions were carefully unhurried. The serpent with sluggish reluctance, as if entangled in its own coils, crawled to the box, raised up under the guiding lift of her hands, hesitated, motionless as if listening, then sank down and slowly drew its long body, with many pauses as if again warily listening, across the box's edge; and all the while she stooped, stroking and urging on the sliding body, and humming softly.

Heddon and Raeburn, both as staringly motionless as if they had been struck into helplessness by the serpent's magnetic eye, watched; there was in this more of the *diablerie*, of dangerous mystery, than when the woman, bespangled, raised half the python's length from its box before the footlights and staggered under its sluggish coils. The thing had the weight of a heavy man, was fanged and muscled, was a monster among snakes greatly fabled for a terrible strength; and was invested too with the traditional awe, and inbred race-fear of the serpent.

Raeburn, with quick scrambling as the lid was lowered, got off the bunk and bolted for the door.

Madame put down the lid, gently, threw the latch, and straightening turned toward Heddon. Her face appeared bloodless, more pale than powder, and a nervous tremor ran through her body, momentarily rigid.

"What's the matter?" Heddon asked, frowning, mystified. "You look scared yourself!"

She closed her eyes in shaking her head, and smiled before opening her eyes; then said:

"No, no, eet is not fear. Eet is—I do not know. Sometimes like now he draws somesing from me, from ze heart of me. Fear? Ho ho, monsieur! I do not fear! But he is wise, so ver' wise. Once I was seek, wiz ze fevar. Oh I burn like ze soul on fire, ze wicked soul. I sink to ze floor an' eet is like death! I know nothsing till I wake. I am col'. My head eet is on heem, an' like a ring he is coiled about me, close. I haf no fevar. Eet is gone! He took eet out of me. Is zat like fear?

"Ah, when I was a leetle babee, my father he put me in a cage wiz a beeg snake an' people zay come to pay to look while I play wiz the beeg snake. Is zat fear? No. But when he wants he can draw somesing out of me so I am col', like now. He is so ver' wise. Baal-Phlegor, zat is his name!"

"That's the Devil's name if ever he had one!"

"Oho, zer is no Devil, monsieur! Only ze 'magination an' ze"—lightly—"ze police!"

"The world's full of devils," said Heddon. "But what I want to know is who was that Chink girl to be worth the —— she's raised?"

Madame eyed him carefully; and though not a muscle seemed to move on her pale face, there was somehow a look of cold cunning in her expression that gave Heddon much the same feeling as when he had stared at the snake. He hated snakes and snake-women; there must, he felt, be something deeply wrong with any woman who could handle and would love a snake.

"You want," said Madame, "zat I be clevar an' lie, or tell to you ze truth of Po-Shu?"

"Either way, I probably won't believe you."

"No? Oh yes, yes, I make you! Ze truth, thees is eet. You know, monsieur, ze Engleesh—so up-straight, so—how you say eet, *cafard?* So up-straight yet hypocreetic? Now ze French, zey are a weeked people! But ze Engleesh— Zut! No, zey so —— up-straight! Zey rule India, zey rule some China, zey rule some Egypt, zey rule zese oriental countries zat haf rajah, an' mandarin, an' sultans. An' zese men zey love only women an' jewels—women more zan jewels. Oho, to pleese a rajah, ze weeked French, monsieur, zey would breeng a bootiful dance-girl as a geeft, an' ze rajah he would zen give ze French merchants favors. Yes? Ze up-straight Engleesh, zey not do zat—only secretly, so nobody know, an' zey say eet a lie zat zey do eet at all. An Engleesh merchant he has a man come from China wiz Po-Shu who is to be taked to India where is a young rajah zat so loves pretty dance-girls zat he loves whoever eet is zat breengs heem one as a geeft. Hoh! I learn all zis, an' I steal Po-Shu from where she is keeped! I know too zat she is more precious zan jewels. Thees is in Sydney, an' I can not get a sheep to go where I want because ze up-straight hypocreets zey watch close-sharp to catch Po-Shu back. *Couennes!* Stupids! I black Po-Shu like Zudag an' we go on a trade-boat to a leetle island. Zen we go by trade-boat to anozzer island, all ze time to get more an' more from ze Engleesh! We sink at Lianfo we are too far for anybody to know or care—zen bad luck eet come. Zat, monsieur, is ze truth. You believe me?"

"Yes," Heddon admitted slowly, disgusted, half angered by the feeling that this onyx-eyed woman, like a snake, had coiled about the little Chink girl, "I rather think I do."

"So, see? I said zat you would beleeve me. A woman, monsieur, sometime she lie to be thought better zan she is, sometime to be thought not so good. But when she tell the truth, monsieur—why?"

There was a luring tone in her voice, a creeping warmth in her body which, though she did not move, seemed drawing closer and closer to him. Heddon stepped back.

"Well, why?" he growled.

"Ah, you, a beeg brave man try to steal Po-Shu an' fail! I, when I try, did not fail. What you sink of zat, monsieur?"

"That you're going to wish to —— you'd never heard of 'er!"

Madame stiffened. Something was wrong.

"What you mean, monsieur?"

"Mean? We're wrecked an' adrift not ten miles off Lianfo an'—"

"Wrecked!"

"—an' no boats to get off in. If we did get off, no place to go but Lianfo!"

"Wrecked, monsieur!"

"Wrecked aloft, and a-leak. That's pumping you hear. We'll be picked off sometime tomorrow and carried back to Lianfo. Then what? Make sure before the thing's ended Old Davy'll know you kidnaped the Chink girl. You'll be slammed in a prison no bigger than that snake box."

"Monsieur, thees is outrage!"

"Steal a girl to sell her to a nigger prince. You'd feed a baby to that —— snake, I bet."

"You ——" Madame swore at him abusively in violent French, used such words as he had never before heard and so could only guess their meaning from the worst that he did understand. "—you try to steal her too, that I could sell her!"

"Old Davy'll probably swing me, or wish he could. Be no more than right—such a fool ought to hang! We're all in for it, you, gentle lady, as deep as any."

"But oh, monsieur—" Madame's tongue came back to English—"I was ze frien' to you! Abdul, he save your sheep, an' I praise heem. Please, monsieur, you mus' help me. You weel say to ze magistrate zat Vioux—Vioux he get you to steal Po-Shu? Me, I know nothsing! An' zat was a lie, a beeg lie, monsieur, zat I steal Po-Shu at Sydney—a beeg lie! Monsieur, I was your frien'. Abdul I praise heem for ze fight an'—"

"Oh ho!" said Heddon, "I see it now! You were in with that wild Irishman till his bunch was licked—then faced about so fast you had all of us fooled. Threw over your friends to get on the winning side, eh? That's the woman of it!"

VIII

OLD TOM went below to see his friend Abdul.

Abdul was sitting on a stool, bracing hmself against the schooner's roll with one arm against a bulkhead, the other against the bunk's edge-board. He scowled sullenly.

"Abdul, me son, I've seen some men as was good, I seen some better, but I never seen one as c'd best you. An' now that ye're on my side, you an' Heddon got to be friends."

"*Nein!* Dot Heddon, I can deadt beadt him!"

While they were talking, Vioux ventured to the door and made reproachful sounds. Abdul, full of sour wrath, growled and made a move to rise.

Vioux went hurriedly backward and disappeared into the pantry, which seemed the only place where he could be out of the way and still not be alone. He did not like to be alone. And here Denasso, full of hop, dreamily drunk on a pallet, gazed at him listlessly as Vioux unhappily begged God to fry Abdul's soul, like a pancake, forever and ever, to damn Will Heddon, to curse Madame, the Grogan, everybody; and though he cursed in English, which offers the more malignant oaths, he cursed like a Frenchman in that his explosive violence trailed off into the endless muttering of bad names.

CHAPTER V

THE CHINESE BOAT

DAWN came as if timidly through rain; instead of darkness being split wide open with the burst of sunrise, a murky glow filtered through the clouds, and for a moment or two even after it grew light the ocean, near and far as could be seen, was black as if the schooner floated on a sea of ink.

The pump was clanking. Men's shapes became vaguely outlined, mistily etched by rain and gray light as they bent and rose, bent and rose, like the kowtowing suppliants that they were. The *Dragon's* leaks took in water as fast as the pump threw it out, and their pumping was a desperate prayer that the ship might live until light came so they could make a raft and get away.

Aloft, the schooner had a weather-driven gale-stripped look; amidships and all forward the deck was a mess of raffle. The falling mast had smashed boat and bulwark and lay like a captive thing in a tangle of rigging. Torn sails drifted raggedly in the water.

Old Tom, peering into the first glimmer of dawn had said—

"Ain't a bad sea, Will."

"F'r wot?" Old Bill inquired sourly. "F'r swimmin'?"

"For a raft. But I've swum in worse."

"Aye, but now, Tom, yer older. More weighted down with sins," said Bill, and with an air of satisfaction nibbled a stick of wet tobacco and winked at Raeburn.

As daylight pushed back the darkness from the face of the water, all eyes soon turned staringly toward one long lump of black that, in the growing light, took on a mountainous outline.

"There she is," said Heddon, "waiting for us!"

"From one of the hilltop houses a glass could pick us off," said Raeburn.

"Probably can't see us from the town's hillsides. We lie to the south."

"Can't see us!" Old Bill squinted through his hands, one before the other as if he held a telescope. "W'y, I can see ol' Davy 'oppin' on 'is verander!"

"You ain't bein' funny," Old Tom told him with conviction. "At your age, you're bein' an idgit!"

Denasso, full of hop, inquired blandly:

"What does it matter, idiot or sage? Death feeds on flesh. Does the shark care if a man reads Greek? Then how much less Death, who eats all men?"

Tom glared at him suspiciously, Old Bill sidled off a bit in honest doubt as to whether the fellow was sane. Heddon, sniffing the opium pipe, which he detested, seemed about to say something brutal, but turned on Raeburn:

"Fetch me the glass, Jack. I want to see 'ow 'igh ol' Davy's 'oppin'! And while below, Jack, take a look at yourself in the mirror. With that scarf and tassels—you look like a picture-book pirate."

Raeburn swore at him, and Heddon laughed, seemingly at Raeburn, but really he was bitter and angered at the twist luck had given him, dismasting his schooner by the dark shore line from which he had fled in the night.

Raeburn turned to go below, then turned about and waited to see what was coming next.

The men had left off pumping, and the others who had taken their turn at resting did not fall to as usual, but all bunched together as some talked. There was much nodding and head-turning toward where Heddon stood; and when he laughed, every man of them turned and stared.

Then they came, strung out stumblingly; many did not want to be in the lead, others were more resolute. One fellow, not meaning to come at all, sat in huddled shivering. After a sweat at the pump, the rain was chilling. Then, as if it would make him too conspicuous to remain alone, he got up and followed.

Old Bill warily moved backward and picked up an ax where he had stowed it for an emergency, under a discarded oilskin; then leaning restfully on the handle of the ax, he eyed them with patriarchal mildness.

"We don't mean trouble, mates," said Pelew, truthfully, but with no humbleness.

"Don't be callin' us mates!" said Old Tom.

"I mean it friendly, but if you don't like it—suits me. Right here an' now!" Pelew's bold eyes looked at Tom, at Heddon, glanced at Raeburn, glared at Old Bill, passed by Denasso. He was a dark fellow, thick of chest, long of arms, with a perpetual staring look in his eyes. No one answered him. He went on, "An' as f'r that, I guess there's as good men here by me, as there with you fellers—though these are a bunch o' swabs!"

Some one by him muttered, grumbling at the insult. Pelew faced about:

"You heard me! Swabs, the lot of you!"

Bullied into silence, the men near him shuffled their feet and looked away, studying the weather. They were tired, disheartened, miserable.

Pelew faced about again, eying Heddon:

"Now we hear you fellers laugh, an' talk, as if havin' a bit of a joke jus' now. We'd like to know what's what, we would. I want to laugh some too."

"Sound the well and look aloft," said Heddon. "That tells you as much as we know."

"An' what's in that to make you stand here in the rain at sun-up an' laugh? There's somepin else!"

He glared accusingly. And though he had just abused them, the men stood close behind him, as if backing him up, and blinked suspiciously. They were chilled, anxious, mystified as to why Heddon on a wrecked ship would laugh in the dawn; but, not wanting a fight, they shuffled from foot to foot uneasily. Pelew might make trouble with his ugly speech and half defiant manner.

"I don't pump no more," said Pelew.

"You fellers 'd 'a' been drowned if we hadn't pumped!" an aggrieved voice called across Pelew's shoulder.

Heddon did not answer, did not seem to notice. He was looking seaward, peering steadily. Others turned, watching in the same direction.

Some one asked—

"What you see?"

Others inquired of one another—

"What's he lookin' at?"

"I saw somethin'," said one.

"What?"

"Ain't nothin'!" said another.

"By —— there is!" Pelew shouted, and made a scrambling jump into the mainmast rigging, where he hung and peered.

"Anybody in it?" Heddon called up to him.

"Ain't sure! Can't see 'er now. There she is—an' gone. I see flash o' oars—yeah, two men—three—more! She's dropped again. 'Bout a mile, I make out. Blasted hard light for to judge in."

Raeburn came with the glass. Heddon took it, climbed up and hung side by side with Pelew; and when Heddon had taken a long look, he then in a half absent-minded way passed it to Pelew.

Pelew stared for a long time, only now and then catching a glimpse of the small boat as it bobbed up on the rise of a wave.

"I made out four," said Heddon.

"Yeah. An' they're pullin' for us. By ——, that's good! Castaways makin' f'r a sinkin' ship!"

Then he laughed, and the men stared up wonderingly. Some one called—

"Now what *you* laughin' at, Pelew!"

"Below there, you swabs, get on that pump! Make her sing, or by —— I'll—!" There was a kind of spontaneous savagery about him, a high-tempered suddenness; and he swung clear of the rigging, holding on with one hand and foot, hanging as if about to drop down among them if they did not stir. "Ye hear me, you ——!"

With upward uneasy glances, and dour mutterings one to another, they did stir. He glared, watching them. Then to Heddon:

"They're not sailors. They're blasted swabs. If they hadn't been, we'd 'a' laid you fellers out las' night. Know that, mister?"

Heddon eyed him with a friendly dislike; a hard, tough fellow, and bad, but not bad enough to pretend any friendliness now; he simply took a sort of truce for granted as they hung elbow to elbow in the rigging.

"You see," said Pelew, twisting about so as to have a better look at Heddon, and looking him up and down, "you see, mister, we didn't dare hurt you much. It'd 'a' spoiled things. An' we couldn't hurt that —— Abdul—we didn't know how. I swung a pin down on 'im hard as I could. Blasted squarehead, he never felt it. Oh ever'thing it started wrong, an' kept right on goin' the way it started. Grogan planned it an' brought us fellers out after dark. We was down in the focsle there when you come aboard, then we flopped below into the forepeak. Grogan didn't have the guts, mister. If I'd known then what I know now, I'd 'a' knocked him in the head an' run things myself. Then where'd you ha' been, mister?"

"Where?"

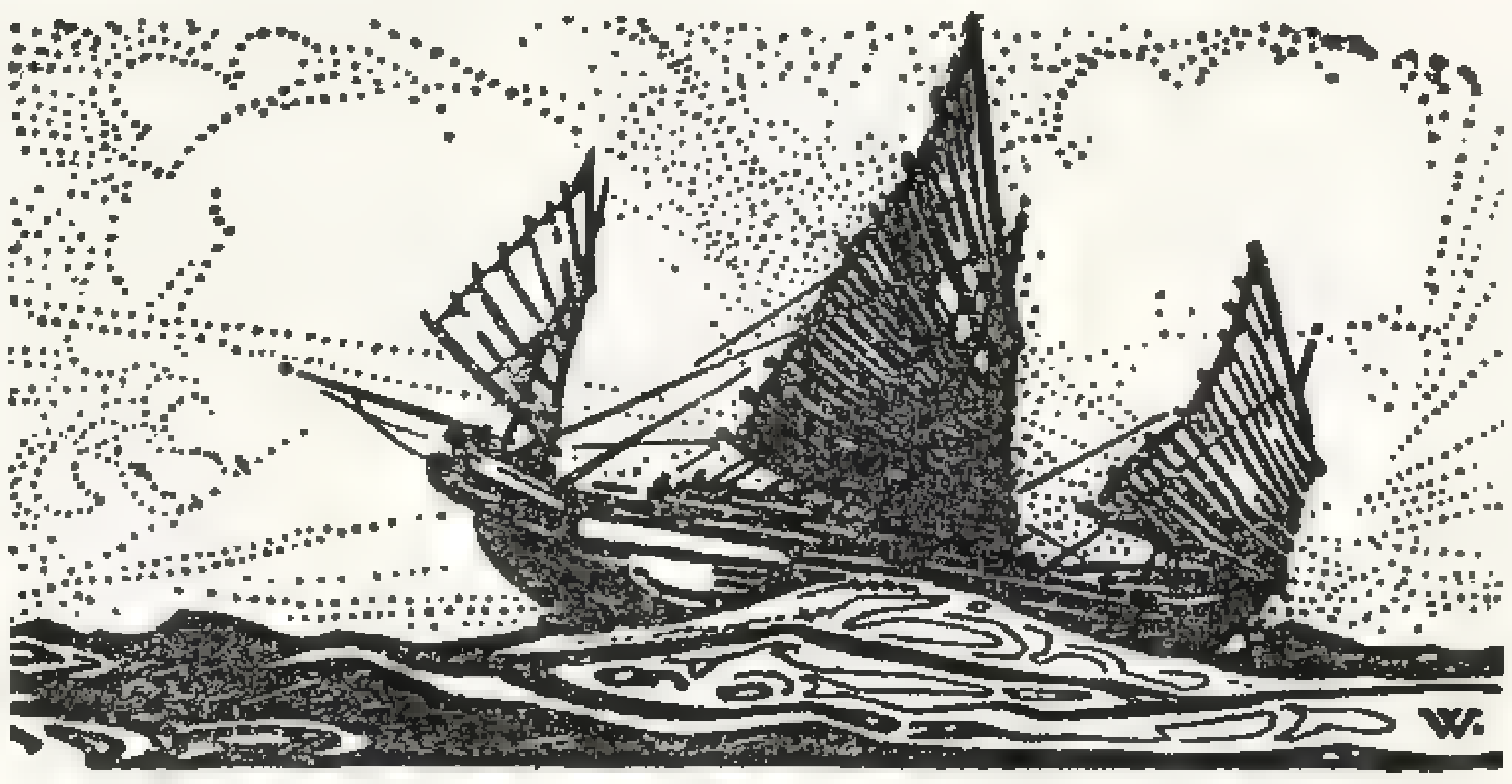
"You'd 'a' laid a straight course f'r that island o' yourn, or I'd 'a' lashed you to the bowsprit f'r a figgerhead. I done that onct over in the Pelews. I did. Skipper he got drunker'n usual, was a-goin' lash me up f'r bit o' rope end. Me! I said to the mate, 'You lay hand on me an' I'll cut your —— heart out an' ram it down your throat.' I'd 'a' done it, jus' to show 'im. He went back to talk it over with the skipper, an' I talked it over with my mates. We rushed the after guard—she was jus' a dirty trader. Two off'cers an' us five seamen. We lashed the skipper to the bowsprit, then beached the —— ol' tub. That there mate, he wasn't a bad feller, but somebody hit 'im harder'n they meant, an' he died. That's what Grogan was afraid you'd do."

His frank rascality had almost an air of honesty. Heddon eyed him, half liking him, greatly distrusting him.

Pelew reached over and took the glass out of Heddon's hand, took it with a kind of friendly assurance as if it partly belonged to him.

It was not easy to sight with the schooner's sluggish roll and jar making the glass slip and waver, and Pelew looked for a long time. Suddenly he crouched down in the ratlines, peering hard, now through, now over the glass, and began swearing vaguely in broken exclamations; then he thrust the glass at Heddon and shouted:

"Look! Look now, mister! By —— they're Chinks or I'm a Dutchman! They're comin' f'r us! We'll get that boat away from 'em, an' they—if they want to stay afloat, they can pump ship, heh?"



THE Chinese came on. By the time they were within reach of a far hail the men had left off pumping, and all on the *Dragon* were crowded elbow to elbow along the rail in the rain as if they were not enemies.

Pelew was by young Raeburn; it was Pelew who had nearly brained him the night before, and he took a long look at the scarf about his head as if critically eying the result of work well done.

"Should ha' kept your mouth shut," he

told Raeburn accusingly, and reaching out twiddled the dangling fringe of the scarf. Raeburn drew back, pulling away. "Purty," said Pelew. "Yeah," and grinned. He had a big mouth. "Wonder would she tie me up that way, too? Huh? I'd take the wallop—what's a wallop? I like women. Ain't many like her ever put their hands on a feller. Feller like you, anyhow. Lucky, you was. Ort'o thank me."

The Chinese were having no easy time of it. It was a wonder how their boat had lived through the night. They came within voice-distance, but did not lift a shout; and from the *Dragon* men watched and no one hailed them.

"Out of the deep, like one of its mysteries," said Denasso, still warm with opium.

"No myst'ry 'bout it," Old Tom told him irately. "They lost their ship, that's all!"

Pelew—he always spoke loudly—suddenly thrust out an arm and shouted. "Would you look! Him in the stern there! He's not only steerin'—he's scullin'!"

"Yaller or white, a crafty 'and he's got, an' knows water!" said Old Bill, which showed how admiringly absorbed he was in the yellow man's boatmanship, for it was a point of pride with Old Bill not to praise people without suggesting how they could have done better.

The yellow man in the stern was not sitting, standing or kneeling; he was braced in a kind of squatting posture that made him appear of short build and long waist. As he approached the *Dragon* he seemed incurious, and hardly took his eyes from the sea in a glance toward the schooner, so warily did he watch the water.

The rowers were clumsy, perhaps tired into clumsiness. Tired or not, the steersman kept his skill; and time and again, eying the rolling rise of the wave behind him, with what appeared no more than a hair's breadth to spare, he gave a powerful sweep that bent his oar like a bow and put the stern of the cockleshell cleverly into the lift of the wave so that the boat rose and was pitched forward without shipping more than a capful of water. Now and then one of the rowers drew in his oar, bent and splashed frantically with a bailer.

"Ain't much more'n a punt!" said Old Tom. "An' in a follerin' sea."

It is the high following sea that breaks the hearts of those who think themselves good boat-steerers.

This fellow, stripped to the waist, was alert as if in the midst of a fight; it was his coolness, and the perfect timing of the stroke that put his frail boat into the heave of the water that aroused an admiring interest in wet and miserable sailors on the wreck. There was not a one of them, and some repeatedly, but asked one another how that boat had lived through the night, it being nothing but a light low skiff such as was used by sea-slug fishermen in poking about flat reefs at low tide.

When it came within easy voice call, those at the *Dragon's* rail could hear the steersman's quick words thrown at the rowers. Heathen words, mere fragments of speech, but the sound of them was the sound of command; and weary as his rowers were, it was evident by their anxious glances that they were afraid of him.

Everybody, excepting the negro Zudag, had come on deck to watch the Chinamen's boat.

Madame was carefully wrapped from head to skirt hem in a man's oilskin; and by some woman's—some French woman's—trick, some twist of hand as she held the black coat about her, she looked, if not neat, at least fastidious. The oilskin was hooded about her head in a way that kept off the rain, protecting her heavy coils of fine hair.

Vioux was there. The perky tips of his dainty mustache were now frazzled and adroop. He had slept badly, or not at all; and he was as wet as if some one had taken him by the neck and dipped him into a bucket of water. In his happy hours, Vioux had the air of a genial aristocrat; but the stuff called stamina was not in him.

Abdul, aloof and sullen, stood apart bulkily, full of sour anger, not interested in anything. The mirror had shown him a bruised and swollen face; his flesh ached; his cigarets, dampened by the moisture even between decks, would not burn, and there had been no breakfast, not even coffee.

II

THE boat had gone around the *Dragon* and was now approaching under the lee; and in the boat, at the moment of sliding, almost on end, down a comber, could be seen a fifth person, one lying huddled in the bottom, half under a thwart, as if crippled or useless and stowed there to be out of the way, but with face lifted in anxious peering.

Pelew cried—

"A woman!"

"Po-Shu!" said Denasso. Madame exclaimed, "Po-Shu! Po-Shu!" Vioux yelled and made a scrambling effort to rise higher on the *Dragon's* rail, the better to see.

"In the boat, there!" said Madame, thinking Vioux had not seen. "Wait! You will see. She is in the boat."

"She was the bad luck, Lucille! Because of her everything went to the devil!"

"Though we sink," said Madame with sharp teeth tightly shut, "I will make her wish she was unborn!"

"Do so! That is right, Lucille. She played us the ——." Vioux chattered in flattering eagerness to have Madame again in a good humor with him.

Denasso, who had overheard them, looked about a little anxiously for Heddon; but Heddon was not close. He had taken up a length of line, coiled it, and stood by to throw.

The Chinese seemed warily hesitating, as if not at all sure that, after all, he was not the better off in his cockleshell than he would be on that dismasted hulk where there were so many people. But, having glanced toward the bow, he turned his face and looked out across the tumbling water toward the rain-blurred outline of land.

Heddon held high the coil of rope, showing it, showing what he meant to do, and called—

"Stand by!"

The steersman said something, and the fellow nearest the bow turned about, got on his knees awkwardly trying to get his oar in board. He knocked it against the gunwale, and barely saved himself from going overboard. A moment later Heddon threw the rope. Its wet length fell across the bow and the man laid hold.

Immediately the three Chinese who had been rowing began a hubble-bubble of talk and gesticulation, apparently talking about what to do with the rope. The steersman spoke sharply and they became, instantly, silent.

Madame was calling excitedly down to Po-Shu, who stared upward; her face was like a small porcelain mask, but the eyeholes in the mask disclosed amazement, fear, hopelessness. It seemed the magic of devils that Madame, from whom she had fled, should be here. Madame's words were eager and though falsely gentle, the little Po-Shu was not deceived, and did not answer.

Evidently the Chinese, the night before, had wanted to see how their prize would look if properly attired. Her black hair fell about her face and shoulders in stringy tangles, but she wore an embroidered, many colored blouse and silk trousers. The blouse clung to her as clamily as wet tissue paper. Long green earrings dangled at her cheeks.

Denasso pulled young Raeburn by the arm and led him to Heddon. In spite of his air of easy unconcern and indolence, the unhappy musician had felt Heddon's contempt of him; and though poppy might give him ease from certain kinds of pain, it did not save him from humiliation when Heddon eyed him just about as if eying a leper. He thought with Raeburn standing by, as if to confirm what he said, that Heddon would listen more readily.

"Captain, please," said Denasso, almost showing agitation, "please don't let them abuse that child! They know they've lost her because we'll all have to go back there —" he gestured without looking toward the land—"and they are devils! Both of them! They've fed me opium, and I've stayed, done always what they wanted. But that woman—their game in Paris was decoying men and blackmail. Abdul was their bully. She'd kill me for telling. But Po-Shu is a child. Don't let them—"

Heddon, followed Denasso's quick landward gesture and saw dimly through the rain haze a ship bearing out from Lianfo.

"Don't worry," said Heddon, pushing Denasso aside. "Old Davy and his niggers are coming to the rescue of your Plum Blossom. See that, Jack?"

Raeburn looked away into the murky morning and made out the craft as a bark; as there had been only one bark in the harbor, this would be Walscher's *Jack-girl*, as men rudely called the *Jacienta*.

Heddon called Old Bill to him, turned him about and pointed:

"See that! Know her? Now you —— old gray-beard hypocrite, down on your knees an' get us a miracle!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Student of the Tongs

A story of Chinatown

by T. S. Stribling

WHILE covering for the *Evening Ledger* the last outbreak of the tong war in the Chinatown district of New York, I had the fortune to meet and to know with considerable intimacy the late Mr. David Landrum Wing, the Chinese student, whose mysterious death in a dormitory of the New York University aroused so much curious speculation among the metropolitan journals.

As a newspaper man I have naturally published the facts as I saw them of this tragic and peculiar event, but for personal as well as professional reasons I have avoided coloring my account with my private theory of the case.

I will say therefore, briefly, that I first met David Landrum Wing in the study of Dr. Midwell Barker, instructor in sociology in the University of New York. I had called to interview Barker in regard to his investigation of racial crosses in New York City. The sociologist was in person a great shaggy man with a flat yet handsome face which seems somehow typical of popular university instructors in America. I had interviewed Barker with fairish frequency. He occupied, I found, the purely pagan attitude common among American college men, and this he served up with a dash of irony. I could always rely upon Barker for some new and shocking point of view about any subject which came under his hand, and this made him valuable copy because the American public always prefers a shock to information.

Well, he had been discussing the effect of racial crosses for upward of a dozen minutes when a young Chinese entered the room and, during a break in Barker's monolog, asked if the doctor could give him his assignment.

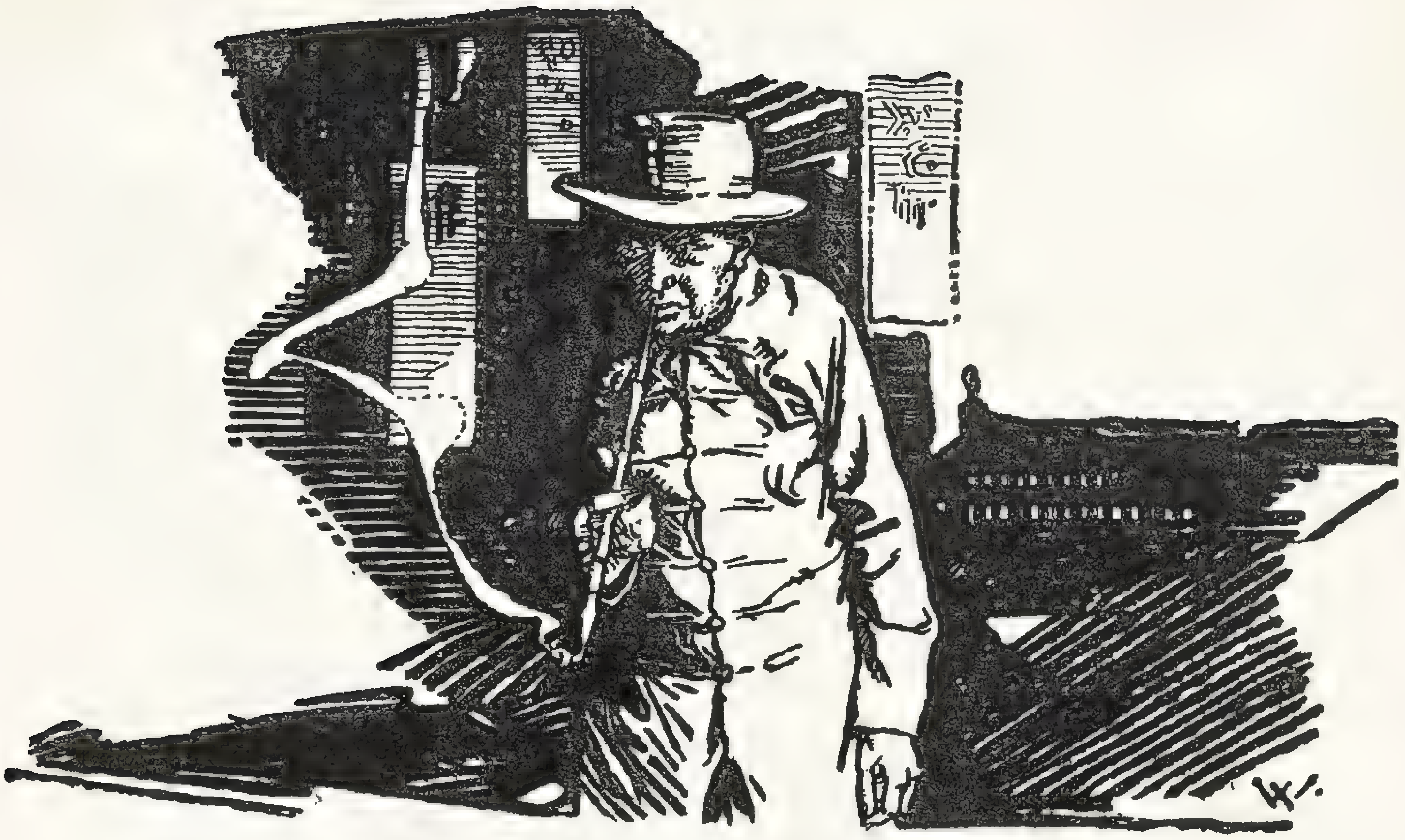
The sociologist got to his feet with his characteristic effect of mounting enthusiasm.

"Wing," he said, "you're Chinese, I'm going to give you Chinatown."

Wing bowed slightly and stood at attention with a flavor of the military in his manner.

"I am interested in the Chinese tongs," proceeded Barker, "I believe there is something significant in these secret societies. The American undergraduates whom I have sent down there have never been very successful in their study of these organizations. They usually come back after eight or ten days and tell me, for example, that the enmity between the two rival tongs in Chinatown was caused years ago by a cashier of the On Leong society embezzling some funds and joining the Hip Sing society." Barker laughed, "I warn you of this pitfall in time so you won't tumble into it."

"Then you don't believe that explanation?" queried Wing with so perfect an American accent, down to its very nasality, that I was a little surprized.



"Hardly," smiled the sociologist. "I don't know what is the cause of the tong wars which break out simultaneously in all the larger American cities, but I do know it is not the result of a theft committed years ago. The Chinese are not feudists."

Wing listened impassively to this opinion.

"Would you advise any method of procedure or approach, Doctor Barker?"

The sociologist hesitated a moment. "As a matter of fact, I have a very clear-cut program. I don't know what you will think of it, Wing, but I have often wished I had a member of my class in one of the Chinese tongs."

"Why especially that?" asked the Chinese with rather an effect of politeness than curiosity.

"For two reasons. All modern fraternities are the left-overs of a more primitive state of society. This character has been about washed out of our present day organizations although they retain their secret passwords and calls for aid; but the Chinese tongs here in New York are actual going concerns. They are genuine primitive societies. Their oaths are genuine; their threats of vengeance, genuine; their duties, genuine; and their fealty, genuine."

At this point I interrupted to point out a rather obvious obstacle.

"It seems to me, Mr. Wing might find a moral difficulty in taking the oaths of secrecy and joining either tong for the express purpose of making a scientific study of the organization. You know, gentlemen, the very essence of science is that it is a body of common knowledge. The very word itself suggests something formulated with precision—and published."

Dr. Barker looked at me with a certain amusement in his eyes.

"If scientists do not hesitate in their investigations on account of religious dogmas is it logical for them to show greater respect for fraternal secrets? When a scientist enters a tong to study it, then naturally its oaths do not apply to him because the oaths themselves fall into the field of his legitimate investigation."

This struck me as pure scientific casuistry but I did not press my point, because after all a newspaper man sees and hears so many untoward things that after a while he gives up the notion of reforming the world.

When I finished my interview Wing said he would go down-town with me. We took the subway down-town and in the bottled-up roar of the tunnel we could converse almost with complete privacy.

My Chinese acquaintance seemed a little puzzled about something, and presently he betrayed his slant toward Barker's attitude by saying,

"I thought American colleges took the strictest view of ethical and religious action."

I looked curiously at Wing's impassive

face and wondered if he were stringing me in some solemn Chinese way.

"Where did you come by the idea, Wing?" I asked on my guard.

"At the University of China in Peking."

"What sort of an institution is the University of China that it libels American colleges by calling them moral! It will get blacklisted if it isn't more discreet."

"The University of China did not teach me that formally," denied Wing, "I simply picked up the impression there. That is why I was surprized at the grounds Dr. Barker took for my joining one of the Chinatown tongs."

Just then, from my rather desultory newspaper reading about China I recalled something—

"Let me see, isn't the University of China an institution run by the American missionaries over there?"

Wing nodded.

"My two first names, David Landrum, were given me by my father out of reverence for the first American bishop in China."

Even at this first mention of his training, I caught a kind of wordless inkling of the strained, almost grotesque position in which circumstance had forced this young Chinese, but it was simply a quiver, an adumbration which a few months were destined to resolve into a solid enough tragedy. My feeling of incongruity slipped away from me and left me staring a little emptily at Wing.

"Barker's sociology being what it is," I suggested, "are you going to join the tong?"

"I'll have to think that over very seriously."

"Your objection being quite moral?"

"Certainly."

"Are you aware that joining a Chinese tong to publish your observations is about the equivalent of hammering a stick of dynamite to test its chemical reaction?"

"I know there is a physical risk attached to it," admitted Wing.

"It isn't a risk, it's a certainty."

By this time our train was roaring into Canal Street station. I got up, shaking hands with Wing:

"Well, here's luck to you, and you'll need it. And I wish you'd take my card. I'm in evenings, usually. Wish you'd look in if you feel like it. It isn't often I meet a man in New York with both nerve and moral qualms. The two things don't seem to go together. I don't want to lose track of you."

And I shoved my way through the car door on to the long underground platform.

For the next few days the thought of David Landrum Wing visited my mind at intervals, and I wondered which would obtain with him, the moral nihilism of Barker or the strictures of the University of China; that is to say, would he join the tong or not?

I came by my answer casually enough. A small fire broke out in Chinatown one afternoon and I ran down to cover the story. I hunted up the owner of the house that was burned, a Chinese called Charley Christmas, a short, fat, yellow man with eyes, lips and chin hanging in bags of self-indulgence. He looked not very unlike the distorted and bulbous Chinese statues for sale in every shop in the quarter. He was always laughing out of a shrewd-eyed befatted calm.

I asked him about his house and he twisted his lips in a droll manner.

"Him insured."

"For how much?" I inquired.

"Why you ask that?"

"To print; it's part of the day's news."

He told me.

I made a note of it and went on questioning him about Chinatown doings.

"Shipping many stiffs back to China these days, Charley?"

"I dig up old Jim Ling tomorrow, send back China. I have permit."

The fat Chinaman heaved up his waistline to reach in a pocket and draw out a permit from the Board of Health.

The fantastic necessity of returning the bones of all dead Chinese to their native land had made a plutocrat out of Charley. Each shipment involved much red tape and none of his countrymen knew how to do this. As returning these bones is one of the prime functions of the tongs, Charley had naturally become president of the On Leongs. As I looked at the permit, I inquired casually:

"How are the On Leongs coming on, Charley—any new members?"

"Why you ask that?" smiled Charley, drawing out a cigaret and offering me one.

"Oh, because you're president of your tong; part of your business. We Americans inquire after a friend's business, you know."

"Oh so-so," nodded Charley non-commitally.

"The reason I asked," I went on, hardly knowing whether to venture into details or not, "a Chinese friend of mine has just come to this country. Of course he wanted to join a tong so if anything happened to him, he'd be taken care of—I recommended you and the On Leongs."

Christmas nodded, I think a little flattered.

"Yes, I no get him in fight. While old Charley head man On Leongs and Hip Sings no fight. Kill man no good business. Let Chin'town do good business; keep money. Ev'lbody likee."

"Look here, Charley," I probed as deftly as possible, "we've been friends for some bit; tell me, why are the Hip Sings and the On Leongs always at outs?"

Christmas smacked his thick lips and stepped closer to me.

"I tell you," he said in a whisper on which I could detect Chinese rum. "Long time ago clerk of On Leongs run off with money, thirty thousan' dollas. Hip Sings took him in as member. The On Leongs told Hip Sings they must not do so, but they did—" he burbled on with the ancient explanation which has been rehearsed in the New York courts in every Chinese murder case. I listened through it patiently.

"So that's how it started?" I said.

"That's how," nodded Charley with his stereotyped smile.

"I'm glad I know at last," said I, and I smiled too. "The name of the Chinese friend I sent to you, Charley, was Wing, David Landrum Wing."

"You know David Landrum Wing?" asked Charley with a completely new sort of interest.

"He is just an acquaintance I made."

"New in New York?"

"Very recent, I believe."

"Come to you first; talk to you?" queried Charley.

"I was down on his ship when it arrived," I misexplained, rather uncomfortable for having started the topic. "I was interviewing the passengers. This young Wing spoke excellent English and we got into conversation—"

"Where he say he come from?"

"I don't believe I asked."

"He ask you about tongs?"

"I think I mentioned them first; I was trying to think of something in New York which might interest him."

Charley drew a last puff and tossed away his cigaret.

"You make talk with Wing; tell him lots things but don't ask much question?"

"Yes, that's it," I nodded.

"You newspaper man?"

"A man takes his moments of rest, Charley," I laughed, "even a New York reporter."

Charley laughed too.

I deduced from this conversation that my friend David Landrum Wing had placed his application to join the On Leongs, and that it was now being considered by the fraternity. So scientific curiosity had won over a strict morality in the court of David Wing's conscience. I hardly know why such a slight falling off from meticulous honesty moved me, but it did. I suppose the sentiment in me was a left-over from Tennyson and the Victorian era. David's action drew me into a mood of much the same pensive sadness that a mother feels when her boy doffs knickers for the long trousers of manhood. And yet, all boys grow into men, and my newspaper experience suggested that all men eventually cashed in their morals for something.

One evening a few days later I received a telephone call from Dr. Barker, and during the preliminary meandering of his conversation I surmised he was after publicity for his new book on racial crosses which was to be published in a few months. So I was a little surprized when he broke off into:

"Would you like to be in my study when Wing comes in with his report? I thought of you, I know you have a lay interest in that field."

"So he really did it!" I ejaculated, my suspicion coalescing into a certainty.

"My dear fellow," laughed Barker's voice in a friendly satire, "New York University doesn't clip her scientists out of the Rollo books."

"I have gathered as much. What time do I come over?"

"He is due here in thirty-eight minutes. You'd better come right on and be here when he arrives; then if there is any hesitation or embarrassment on his part, I—er—leave that to your discretion."

"You mean I clear out?"

"Not unless you see it is absolutely

necessary," urged the doctor cordially.

When I thought over Barker's invitation, I rather admired the fellow's foxiness; inviting me over—to withdraw. A gesture of friendliness, quite empty, but which would be enough to get his book mentioned in the columns of the *Ledger*. I was half minded not to go at all. Still, if I drew the line at Barker, where would I stop; dozens of my acquaintances treated me the same way.

I managed to get to Barker's study ahead of our Chinese friend, and the sociologist reimpressed upon me delicately that I was to set sail at the first symptom of a squall. In fact, one might say, we were arranging my exit when David Wing entered.

I do not know what there was about young Wing that gave me an impression that he was under some sort of mental strain. Hardly his face; a Chinese face is so impassive. I felt I was looking at a mask which screened a very troubled sensitive soul; and in my heart I suddenly thought, "—— Barker, and his university morals!"

I began overtures of withdrawing at once when to my considerable surprize Wing himself stopped me—

"I was just going to your chambers, when I got through here. You remember you invited me. Won't you stay and wait for me?"

"I'll be more than glad," I ejaculated, and I meant it.

Barker began by complimenting Wing on the step he had taken.

"I have often speculated on the tong hostilities here in New York and in other large American cities," he went on. "Of course they are of small moment here in America but I always felt they were indicative of enormous social stresses in the hugest nation on the globe, China's four hundred million."

He turned to me:

"Don't you see how important New York's Chinatown becomes sociologically? To neglect it is to neglect a barometer to the greatest latent social force on the globe today."

I thought to myself, "Barker plays to the galleries and is more or less of an intellectual scrapegrace, but, confound it, the man's got vision. He deserves his réclamé." And I decided, after all, I would do the handsome thing about his book.

"And so, Mr. Wing," pursued the scientist, "while I have an idea about the tongs, I would greatly appreciate knowing the precise point of conflict between the On Leongs and the Hip Sings; what each represents and what they are trying to do."

"It's fairly simple," said Wing impassively.

Barker could not resist giving his lips a faint smack—

"I would like to be informed," he smiled.

"It's simply this," explained Wing, "about six years ago a secretary of the On Leongs named Lin Chung defaulted with thirty thousand dollars of the tong's money and joined the Hip Sings. The On Leongs gave notice to the Hip Sings that Chung was a defaulter and advised them to reject his application for membership. The Hip Sings disregarded this and accepted him. The result was that trouble broke out between the two tongs and has been going on intermittently ever since."

I studied Wing's face in the utmost astonishment as he delivered this ancient fabrication as a serious sociological report to a man who, I must admit, was the dean of American sociologists. I could hardly breathe for amazement. I did not know whether Wing meant it as some kind of wanton jest, or whether it was a subtle and stinging reproof for Barker's suggestion that Wing disregard his fraternal oath; or it might have been ignorance. I did not know what to make of it and I could find no answer by searching David Wing's face.

Barker, however, was not so inscrutable. He was a man of immense self-admiration, and probably saw no facet of Wing's attitude except a deliberate affront to himself. His rather large face went a dusky red.

"Mr. Wing!" he interrupted, his voice sonorous with anger, "may I ask your motive in such absurd clowning as this?"

"Clowning?" repeated Wing.

"You are surely not serious in offering that ridiculous invention as a sober explanation!"

"I learned that from the tong president himself, Doctor Barker," returned Wing seriously.

"Do you believe it yourself?" snapped the professor with his nostrils whitening with tenseness.

"I—naturally hold a philosophic reserve," said Wing with a sort of dogged politeness.

Then suddenly I sensed the real conflict between the two men. I knew that Wing knew, but that he intended to respect his oath. I also knew that for Barker to be balked by one of his pupils over a point which had become of great scientific importance for him must have been exasperating indeed.

"Wing," he said sharply, "it seems to me you fail to understand the relation that exists between a university and its upper classmen. The university does not occupy so much the rôle of instructor as it does that of co-worker. Members of my class are expected to do original investigation. All I can possibly do is to offer suggestions, to try to help each member thresh out the wheat from the chaff. When a member of my class deliberately brings me chaff, nothing but chaff—" he moistened his dry lips and swallowed—"under such circumstances I am unable to see why your relation with the university should continue. Either you do not possess the scientific spirit we wish to inculcate in the University of New York, or you obviously lack the preparatory work necessary to enter my classes. Looking at either horn of the dilemma, I do not see why you should continue in this institution. I do not see how we can gain much from you or you from us."

I knew that Barker had a nasty temper, but I was shocked at the drastic turn he had given the situation.

David Wing's countenance remained utterly impassive.

"I did not expect, Dr. Barker, for the university to gain a great deal from me."

"Your humility is justified," returned Barker with bitterness.

"But I did hope the science you teach would aid me in any public administration I may be called upon to perform in my own land."

"Exactly what sort of information are you seeking, Mr. Wing, and how do you hope to apply it?"

"What I had hoped," said Wing slowly, "was to take back with me a fuller working knowledge of the American democratic ideals."

The sociologist made a faint disparaging moue.

"You assume that an American system can be superimposed upon Chinese life and that it would be an improvement; you do think it would be an improvement, don't you?"

"Why ye-es," admitted Wing in a wondering tone.

"In point of fact such a substitution, if it were possible, would subject China to the fatal disease of all our western nations; that of extreme social brittleness. Our whole western world is in a state of extreme instability. It is so integrated that every part depends upon the perfect functioning of every other part. Not only must all parts of America function perfectly in order for her to maintain her national health, but the whole coterie of European nations must also function perfectly if America thrives. When a whole civilization is in such a state of delicate equipoise, to foresee a debacle is not a prophecy, it is reading the obvious. China, on the other hand, has, you might say, a colloidal social structure. Revolutions can but shake her into some new form which will function as perfectly as the old. There will come a time, Mr. Wing, how far off I do not know, when China will once again become the single repository of civilization upon this earth. Civilization has encircled the globe; it has come back to old China hot and restless, but again it will find safety in her immeasurable flexibility. I would be the last man in the world, Mr. Wing, to assist you or anybody else in the suicidal project of Americanizing China."

Again I was forced to admire Barker. When a man's anger breaks away into an extraordinary vision of world affairs, that person is no ordinary man.

The sociologist bowed gravely to Wing—

"I think we may conclude this interview."

I never felt sorrier for any one than I did for my Chinese friend. To be smothered in an avalanche of rhetorical contempt and angry sophistication— Wing himself arose with a face like yellow ashes. He made a hopeless gesture—

"I did not dream I would be refused instruction because I was ignorant," he breathed more to himself than to Barker as he retired from the room.

The moment he was gone I let Barker have it straight from the shoulder.

"Doctor," I queried, "do you consider that you have done that young man right because he would not violate his society oath and tell you what he knew?"

Barker began to sputter.

"Why, that's ridiculous; you saw for yourself he did not have the preparatory training to enter my classes!"

"Do you mean to say if he had told what he knows of the tongs you would have shipped him?"

"He explained what he knows—nothing!"

"Yes, but what angered you was that he did know something, that he very probably knows everything, and declined to tell. That was his crime and it infuriated you."

Now back of Barker's temper and intellectual acquisitiveness, there really was a decent sort of man. He fumed a little more and shifted to the other leg of his argument.

"I will not assist Wing or any man to Americanize China; that would be a crime against the human race!"

"If you believe that," I cried, "for I never know what you do believe, you and all your ilk are intellectual impresarios, ready to sponsor any novelty—"

Barker threw up a hand—

"You can't really mean that. That's unjust!"

"Perhaps it is," I modified, "but if you mean what you said, that makes it all the more imperative that you take Wing in your classes and demonstrate your viewpoint, for evidently he is going to do something in China, I don't know what, but his whole attitude shows he is going to occupy some position of power there."

Barker admitted this and in fact came around handsomely and said that he had lost his temper, and that he would reinstate Wing in his classes and offer him a personal apology. In fact, before I left his study I was quite won over to the sociologist again, as many another man had been.

Outside I was somewhat surprized to find Wing waiting for me. I approached, intending to tell him that Barker's gust of temper had blown over and that he was again an active member of the doctor's class when my friend astonished me by launching quite another topic as if the wrath of a university professor were the most negligible of his difficulties.

"My friend," he began taking my arm, "what course should a man pursue when a man filled with a sort of selfish good intention stands between him and a great public benefaction?"

"What is a selfish good intention?" I queried.

"A man who has cheated himself into thinking he is doing something for the sake of right, when his real purpose is entirely selfish and unpatriotic."

"Now, Wing," I returned semi-seriously, "when you condemn lack of patriotism you are getting into the higher mathematics of morality where nothing is sure. You know our smart thinkers are standing everything on its head these days, and patriotism comes in for its mauling."

"Don't you believe in patriotism?"

"Ye-es, but I couldn't hold any man's lack of patriotism against him; I know the case against it too well."

Wing dismissed my finicalness with a gesture.

"When a single individual blocks the welfare of thousands, of millions of his fellow citizens, you would know what to do, wouldn't you?"

"I prefer to stick to hypothetical instances," I returned lightly, "and by the way, I got after Barker for what he said to you. He admitted he was wrong. He is willing to receive you in his classes again."

"Yes," nodded my friend, evidently thinking about something else, "then I will continue my residence in the university."

Plainly his expulsion had not weighed as heavily on him as it had on me. This gave me a certain dry amusement at myself.

I saw Wing to his dormitory, bade him good night and went back down-town wondering what was on his thoughts. I realized, too, that the young Chinese stood in a very queer position toward the university.

My next contact with David Wing was slight, and while it struck me as odd, I did not, at the time, attach much importance to it. I was passing through Maiden Lane when my taxi was caught in a traffic jam. Automobiles and trucks were wedged in for a space of two blocks when I observed among them an armored express car. These cars are still sufficiently new in New York to cause a man to stare at them and realize through them the fragile crust of our social security. Through the miniature port-holes of the car I caught a suggestion of movement and then the rear door opened and a Chinese thrust out his head and looked over the blockaded traffic. A Chinese in an armored car was surprizing enough, but a second glance showed me it was my friend David Wing.

I sat staring at Wing in a sort of anxious surprize. I wondered if his finances were so low that he was forced to accept a job as bank messenger to eke out his income.

I was sorry for that; the fellow had an aristocratic way with him that required money. Then it struck me as possible that this was a bit of social investigation my friend was about; anything was likely to happen to Barker's students.

By this time the jam broke; the armored car went one way, my taxi another and Wing passed out of my sight and thoughts.

On the following day I telephoned a motor smash-up into the office and the city editor gave me a hurry call to Chinatown. Thirty minutes later I got out of my taxi to find the winding streets of the old quarter almost deserted. I stood looking up and down the beflagged thoroughfare trying to get at some clue for this extraordinary emptiness, when a plain-clothes man named Fineberg hurried around the corner of Mott Street to a police call station and began telephoning. I ran across to him and at the sound of my feet, Fineberg whirled, the receiver still to his ear and half drew a pistol. When he saw who it was he turned back to his report. In the stillness I could hear him talking to the police captain:

"Not a soul on the street, sir. . . . Yes, sir, it looks bad, like something's about to break loose . . . a squad of men for patrol. . . . I'll be at the tong headquarters, sir."

And he hung up the receiver in the little red-steel box and locked it.

I was at the plain-clothes man's side in an instant.

"What's the trouble now, Fine?" I asked.

"Oh, the tongs are cranking up again; going into action."

Both of us were hurrying along to the tong headquarters at the junction of Mott and Pell streets. As we strode along the silent streets dozens of wry-faced Chinese gods gazed upon us out of the shop windows. Through the deserted thoroughfare came the roar of circumnambient New York; the heavy metallic groan of the elevated which loops the triangle of Chinatown at Chatham Square; the blast of whistles; the pulsation of a distant band; and a thousand other undefined sounds which make up the endless bourdon note of the metropolis.

The tong headquarters was as dead as the rest of Chinatown. Fineberg then began thumping on the dirty green doors that line the street and shouted in the raucous imperative voice which the police affect—

"*Umpi! Umpi! Hoi mon!*" which meant "Detective! Detective! Open the door!"

Doors were opened to us by yellow men and women in that dishabille which low caste Chinese prefer or are forced to. All of the rooms were squalid, many of them had neither windows nor air vents and smelled like an animal's den. Here and there under a gas jet a Chinaman was washing his clothes in a tub of water soupy with dirt. In some rooms cadaverous yellow men lay stretched out on bamboo mats with little bamboo props under their heads. The plain-clothes man kicked them into attention.

"What's up?" he demanded, "what you stay in for all day?"

The sleepers stretched themselves in the utmost innocence.

"Sleepy; me rest today."

"But what is everybody resting for?"

"All sleepy, maybe."

"Maybe; all right; be good boys!"

And Fineberg would hurry away to another source of infection.

In the midst of these futile rounds I mentioned to Fineberg that I had seen a Chinese in an armored car in Maiden Lane.

"Do you suppose that could have anything to do with this?" I hazarded.

"My dear fellow, I don't even make a guess at these chinks—armored car—they may be coming down here to use the thing as a tank—Get these tong men started, they'll do anything."

"But what are they fighting about?" I cried.

"That's easy," ejaculated Fineberg, "a few years ago one of the On Leongs stole some money and joined the Hip Sings—"

Fineberg's recountal was interrupted by a muffled fusillade of shots. The plain-clothes man stopped and listened anxiously for a moment with open mouth.

"That's in some of these rat runs under Chinatown!" he cried. "The whole dirty place is full of 'em! Listen, you go up Pell Street; I'll cut around into Doyers. If you get a line on anything meet me back here in twenty minutes!"

And Fineberg sprinted up the street while I went down it.

I hardly know how I hoped to find the combatants in Chinatown's rabbit warren tunnels, but some wild hope of solving the blank mystery of the tong fighting kept my feet beating down the pavement. Suddenly as I turned from Pell into Mott

Street I saw through a grating right under my feet the flicker of a silk jacket as some Chinese dashed through a burrow. I stopped, peered down through the grating and got the direction of the runway as best I could. It pointed at a tumbledown old tenement on the north side of Mott. As I looked I heard inside this building the sudden hard staccato of automatics. I sprinted for the place. It had an old boarded-up window some nine or ten feet above the level of the pavement. I picked up a loose cobblestone as I went, swung it up and by good luck broke in the rotten boards. I reached up, got my fingers on the sill and then kicked and scrambled up the side of the building. I got up more by stress of excitement than any trained muscular power I possess. As my head reached the level, came a cracking of pistols, something whiffed through the hair of my head and a lock tumbled down my forehead into my eyes. I ducked down, got a full breath and howled at the top of my lungs, "*Umpi! Umpi! Hoi mon!*" I knew they wouldn't shoot a white man if they knew he was white. Not one has ever been killed in a tong war. Then I thrust my head into the opening.

I was overlooking an underground cellar in which a score of Chinese were backed up against the wall all staring intently at the mouth of a tunnel on the opposite side. They held their pistols on the tunnel in the wobbly uncertain fashion of Chinese gunmen, who must thrust the very muzzles of their weapons against their victims before they score a hit.

Suddenly out of the tunnel came muffled reports, and my amateurs below cut loose with a spatter of return fire. The din hammered my ears and the smell of smokeless powder stung my nostrils. I could not force my body through the window, so I hung there staring down on the tong fight in the semi-gloom. Presently I made out the unwieldy form of Charley Christmas, noticed two or three other Chinese I knew, and then, near the back of the cellar, I was amazed to see the immaculate figure of David Wing. The carefully turned out university student looked grotesquely out of place among the dirty silk-jacketed tong men. Just then came another outburst of firing from the tunnel. The men beneath me volleyed back. At that moment I was dismayed to see the heavy figure of Charley Christmas topple forward on his face.

"My ——, men!" I cried, "what have you done!"

For the thought stabbed me that they had destroyed the balance-wheel that had given Chinatown the little peace it had.

Chinatown mêlèes are very like street urchin fights; a single fatality puts both sides to flight. The moment old Christmas lurched over a sudden blanket dropped over the uproar. The Hip Sings, I am sure, scuttled back down the ramifications of the tunnel to their private dens. I, myself, dropped into the street again just in time to see half a dozen bluecoats come flying around the corner. I flagged them and pointed.

"Right in here, men! This house!"

Two or three made a rush and catapulted through the door with their shoulders. We brought up face to face with a detachment of On Leongs lugging old Charley up to the street level. They were in a great hurry to get outside, for Charley was dying, and if he died in a house his spirit would distress the occupants.

In the street the police began a rapid-fire catechism which the On Leongs answered with admirable patience and lack of information.

They didn't know who had shot Charley Christmas. They had heard shots and old Christmas had dropped. They could not tell, they were attacked. They had entered the old cellar to play fan-tan and somebody had shot into them. They themselves had no guns. And sure enough a search showed that all the men were unarmed.

The police sergeant examined the body and then straightened up with puzzled suspicions.

"Look here," he snapped, "this fellow's shot in the back! Where did the bullet come from that did this?"

"Don't know where," quavered a thin old Chinaman, "in house no tell where sound is; no tell; no tell—"

And that, for the time being ended whatever clue I hoped to get concerning the real reason of the tong wars in Chinatown.

On the following day I attended the burial of Charley Christmas filled with a kind of vague depression at the tragedy. The funeral itself passed before my eyes increasing the uneasiness of my mood.

I recall the great broad bulk of the tong president lying in his coffin; his wide impassive face the color of yellow clay set with short stiff black mustache like the wires of an old-fashioned hair-brush. A Chinese band with drums, gongs and pipes clashed out some sort of prestissimo funeral discord, with the pipes standing out like screams of despair.

A cortège of something over two hundred motor cars escorted the dead president to Greenwood cemetery. Offerings of baked fowls and rice were laid on his grave as provision for Charley Christmas's ghost against its journey through the lean kingdom of death.

I came back in a motor with a detachment of police who talked in pessimistic tones about Charley's tragedy. They predicted a continued and more violent tong war.

"How came Charley to be in the Mott Street fight at all?" I asked curiously.

"He wasn't exactly," said the sergeant, "I got that much out of old Tom Fat. When the fight broke out, somebody sent word to Charley by Tom Fat and he came to the Mott Street shack trying to settle the trouble before it was too late."

"Sergeant," I cried, "what is the trouble about anyway?"

"Oh, they tell me it first started over an On Leong clerk stealing some money or something of the sort. I never took much stock in the story. The only time a chink ever gives out information is when he wants to hide something."

"Did Tom Fat say who had sent him?"

"No. He said somebody shouted to him out of the gang. He didn't know the voice; that's what he said. By the way have you heard who is the new president of the On Leongs now?"

"No, I haven't."

"A stranger to me. They elected him last night. His name's Wing, I believe. I hope he makes as good a president as old Christmas."

"Wing!" I echoed with a tickling in my chest.

"Yes, do you know him?"

"I've heard of him," and as an afterthought I added, "seems to be a nice sort of chap—"

For the rest of the motor ride back to town I sat trying to piece the bits of information I possessed into some other form than that which they persisted in assuming—the messenger sent to Charley Christmas; the shot in the back; Wing's immediate election to the tong presidency—

That afternoon I went around to the Adams Express Company, studied the roster of employees and decided very carefully which one I wanted to see. I chose the second assistant clerk for the following reasons: I knew that the assistant superintendent or the chief clerk would reveal exactly nothing at all, and that anything below the third assistant clerk would know nothing at all; so I had to pick out a man young enough to be human and talk, yet old enough to be trusted with some information. So I chose the second assistant clerk.

The fellow's name was Daugherty. At first Daugherty took a stand of very high and disappointing virtue on the matter; but I began to explain the whole complication, how Wing came to the university, his repulse by Dr. Barker, how he had used an Adams armored car, and a little later had shot his own tong president in the back and usurped his place.

"You see for yourself, Daugherty," I pressed him, "what a devilish point of curiosity hangs on this car. I don't say the car had anything to do with it, but you see how easily—"

"Look here," interrupted Daugherty, "that is a queer tale. Now just keep this under your hat and we'll take a look at what that bird was doing with the car."

And he led the way to the vaults where the records were kept.

The Adams Express owns only two of these armored cars so the business of these vehicles on the date I gave was easily traced.

"It was used by the On Leong society," said Daugherty, "to transport twenty thousand dollars in bullion from Mott Street to this express office. Its receipt here is signed by A. Ling, treasurer.

"What did they do with the bullion here?" I questioned.

"Shipped it somewhere I fancy," said Daugherty, "or we probably forwarded it in a letter of credit."

He went into the vault again and brought out another book and searched several pages.

"No, it was shipped in bullion on the same day to the address of Wing Pu Wei at Canton, China."

I leaned over the ledger to stare at the name of the consignee.

"Wing Pu Wei!" I gasped. "Daugherty, do you know who is Wing Pu Wei?"

"No-o," dragged out the Second Assistant staring at me.

"At present he is the winning revolutionary general in China. He'll probably be the next president; my heavens, Daugherty, this is first-page stuff!" and I rushed for the door.

As I went it suddenly occurred to me that David Wing might be some relative of General Wing Pu Wei for I remembered the Chinese inversion of the patronym. To check up this point I hurried around to my chambers to consult an English Who's Who in the Far East.

I reached my apartment house, shot up in the elevator to my rooms, found the book and turned to Wing. I found the general listed, and also two of his sons, Mong Loy and David Landrum. I found that David Landrum was educated at the University of Peking, was unmarried, and was a progressive leader in the Young China party.

I decided to whip up my article then and there without returning to the office, so I went to my typewriter desk, flung up the lid and began hammering off my copy. I let go full swing, telling in detail all I knew of the son of the revolutionist, who had seized the tong leadership in New York City and was shipping bullion to his father. I was right in the heat of my story when my door opened and young Wing himself stepped into my study. I stopped, swung around in my swivel chair, drew a long breath and looked at him. I didn't know exactly what he was going to do; and he might do anything.

The young fellow's eyes rested on my Who's Who.

"Am I immodest to guess you have been looking up my family?" he suggested.

"Not at all," I admitted, "simply correct."

"I had an idea you would follow your information to some such end when you saw me in the express car."

I bowed slightly as there seemed nothing much to say.

"So I came to you," went on Wing, "to ask you in your handling of the disturbances in Chinatown not to stress my connection with the tong of which I so unworthily occupy the presidency.

The polite Chinese formula of "unworthily" struck me just here with a peculiarly apt irony.

"That's a good word, Wing," I snapped, " 'unworthily'. You know you killed old man Charley Christmas, unworthily as you call it, and seized his office. You are the man who sent Tom Fat after him for that very purpose. Now you have the effrontery to come here and ask me to become your accomplice after the fact!"

Wing stiffened with a suggestion of a soldier before a court martial.

"I am asking you impersonally, sir, to preserve a military secret."

"A military secret!"

"Certainly, aren't you aware that China is torn with revolutions, that she is a bedlam of outlawry, intrigue, oppression—four hundred million of people the prey to every sort of misrule or anarchy."

"Does that excuse the murder of a simple old peacemaker in New York whose only object was for the Chinese in New York to live in peace?"

"His pacificism was founded on his own greed and lack of patriotism," stated Wing sharply. "He didn't care what became of the four hundred million of his compatriots so long as he grew rich and fat!"

"How could his prosperity affect China?"

"Because heretofore the tongs in America have been affiliated with the political parties in China. Indeed, they have been the life blood of those parties; the heaviest contributors to our revolutionary movements when no banking establishment would accept so perilous a risk. This man Charley Christmas's policy was nothing but an agreement of the American tongs to desert their trust; to turn over a penniless China to the exploitation of Japan, England, France—a people can't fight without money!"

"So you killed Charley Christmas for that crime?"

"Because as long as he lived, he would keep the tongs at peace by preventing any contributions being sent to China. That is the real mystery Barker and you were digging at. The real cause of war between the tongs was for one tong to send a subscription to its party in China."

"So you sent some money over, and that started a tong war?"

"Certainly it did."

I sat looking at David Wing and struck off on another tack.

"I observed you sent the On Leong funds to your father?"

Wing nodded.

"He is the only patriot in my fatherland in whom I have absolute confidence. You cannot imagine, you can't conceive how unstable the Chinese leaders are. This way, that way, no patriotism, none of the American cement of an inflexible purpose without which a nation is—chaff. So I hope you won't hamper my work here by quoting me or referring to me unnecessarily in your news articles."

Well, there I had my case set out before me. Barker's ideas about the colloidal invulnerability of old China was thrown to the winds, just as a doubt of America's supreme rightness would have been thrown to the winds sixty years ago in all of our then universities. And oddly enough, David Wing's moral earnestness had its way with me. Was Barker right? I didn't know. When a man's house is on fire he doesn't quarrel with the trade-mark on his hose. He uses what he has. And perhaps the duty of the present lies in the present, and not in some indeterminate future. If Wing could bind up the wounds of the present— At any rate I said:

"Wing, I am a reporter. I owe a duty to the *Ledger*. I've got to report the facts of the tong war asbest I can. Now I know this seems a very small matter to you. I realize it must seem the balancing of a mole against a mountain, I—I—" here I broke off my explanation as I looked at Wing.

The expression in his eyes told me that the man who had not stuck at the murder of Charley Christmas meant to go through with his work at any hazard whatsoever.

As I watched him I moistened my lips and cast about for some fabrication, some some way to extract myself from the position in which my too impulsive truthfulness had hedged me. I knew quite well he was armed. My plan wavered a moment between lying to him and making a sudden attack upon him.

Upon principle I think I would have preferred to lie, to parry a threat by subtlety instead of—but at that moment my telephone bell rang. I turned to the receiver and put it to my ear twisting about to keep an eye on Wing. Howell, my city editor was talking. He began sharply:

"I've been trying to get you everywhere. Cut that tong story to a couple of sticks. Go immediately to the home of Mrs. Wolf-Devoe on Fifth Avenue and give me a couple of columns on a charity dinner she is giving. She is going to stage a featherweight prize fight for the championship of the world in the center of her dining-room table."

"My tong story?" I interjected.

"No space for it; cut it to a couple of sticks. The dinner is given for the benefit of a fund for superannuated ministers."

I began laughing out of relief and out of irony at the sort of thing the readers of the *Ledger* really wanted to know.

"That saves us, Wing," I said, and I repeated the message I had just received.

I could feel my companion slide out of a mood taut, tensely strung, and menacing, into the suavely agreeable.

"That's very fortunate for both of us," he smiled politely.

About a month later, our Associated dispatches from China bore news of General Wing Pu Wei's downfall and flight to Tokio. Any one who knew the beginnings of Chinese politics could read that Japan had bought off the general and that he had grabbed what he could of the public funds and fled to Tokio. It was thorough Chinese procedure, that queer land of private honesty and public malfeasance. I wondered about David Wing; had he come to New York as part of an international swindle of the American tongs. I had so lost faith in my own sagacity that I didn't even form an unexpressed opinion.

At about three o'clock the same afternoon, I received a call from Barker telling me in a shocked voice that David Wing had been found dead in his room at the dormitory. He had been choked with a gut string, an instrument so unrevealing that no one could tell whether it were suicide or murder. There were signs of a struggle, but there would have been in either event. Barker asked me if I thought a man from the Hip Sings had attacked Wing. I said I didn't know. He then asked if I had any intimation of the real casus belli between the two tongs. I said I had not.

The papers made a great mystery about Wing's death; they printed plans of the dormitory showing how a Hip Sing man might have entered the building.

The body was shipped back to China.

Hanno's Sword

A Story of the Sword, Gray Maiden,
Through the Ages

By

Arthur D. Howden Smith

NOTE: Each story in this series is built around a group of characters, but the real hero—or heroine—is the sword, "Gray Maiden," which is traced from its forging through the different hands that wielded it down to modern times. Made for the greatest of the Pharaohs, it saw the rise of Greece and the crowning of Alexander's fortunes; it was witness to the greatness and the decay of Rome; it held back the rush of Islam; it knew the birth-pangs of the New World and the last agonies of the Old. There are wide gaps in its history. For generations upon generations it was hidden in tomb or burial mound or hung in grim quietude on the walls of armories. Yet often when men turned to war, eager hands reached out for it, and swung its shining blade in the van of battle. As some medieval owner scratched in the hard, gray steel—

Gray Maide men hail Mee
Deathe doth Notte fail Mee.

SHRILL through the clamor of embarkation pierced the squealing of the elephants. Hamilcar, picking his way over the trireme's cluttered deck, grinned sardonically at the indignant note of protest.

"The beasts have more sense than we," he grunted to himself.

A great glare of torches beat upon the quay, and the masts and hulls of the ships appeared and disappeared in the flickering light like living things. Ashore, the streets were dotted with fires that wove a patchwork pattern across the starless mantle of the night. Men's voices, rattling hoofs, the din and crash of shifted cargo were fused in one thunderous cacophony.

"They should hear us in Rome," mused Hamilcar.

He crossed the grating above the larboard oar-banks, and wrinkled his beaked nose at the fetid stench of the close-packed slaves.

"Phaugh, it is long since I smelt that smell! Sea, there was a time when you meant much to me, but I think Carthage and I are no longer in your debt. Better mold in dry earth than rot in water!"

Forward he came to the ladder ascending to the forecastle, and climbed this to secure a better view of the spectacle; but as he reached the top a dark figure stepped from the shadow of the catapult that cumbered most of the deck-space.

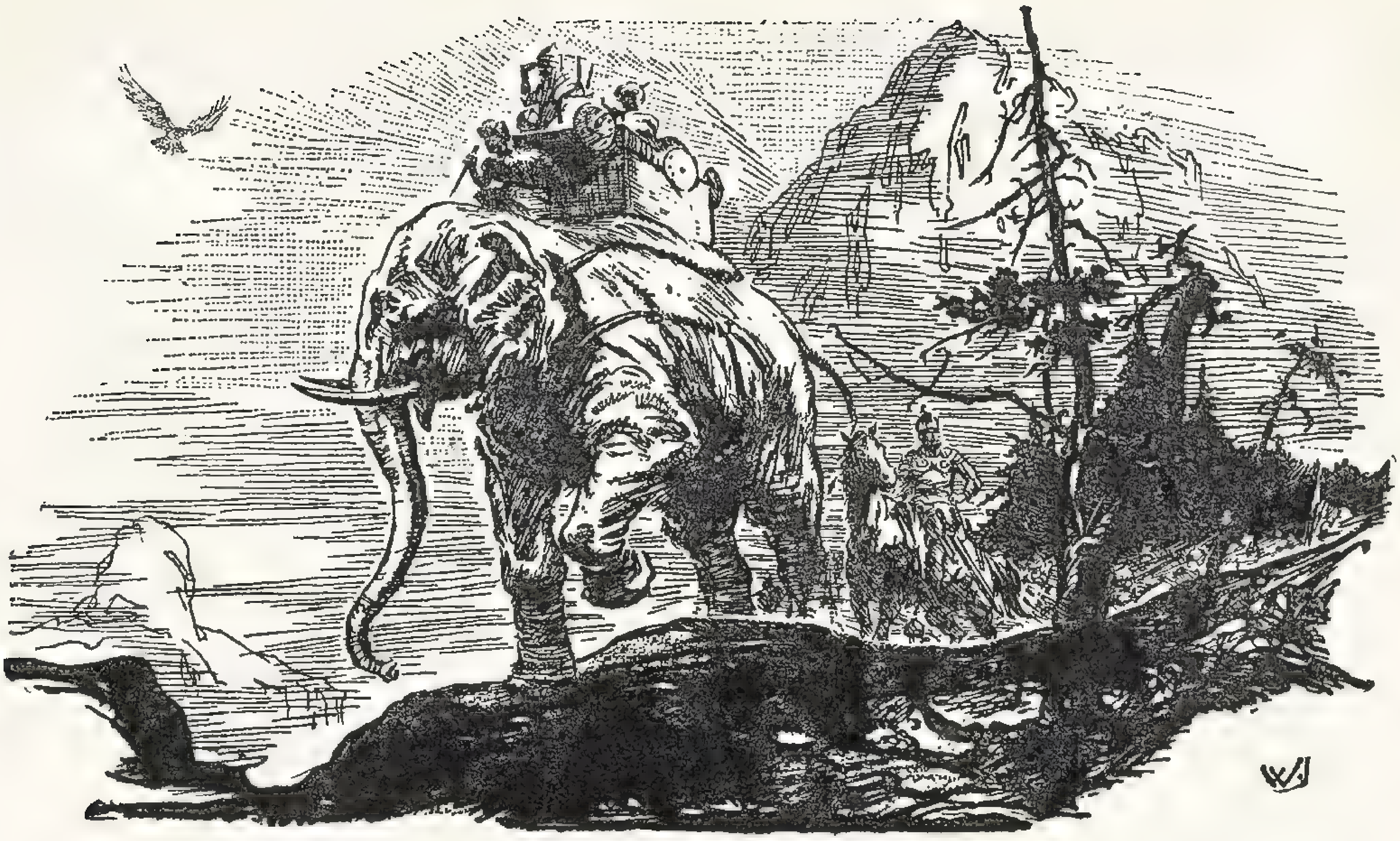
"Back, soldier," snapped the newcomer. "Your quarters are below."

"And who are you?" returned Hamilcar coolly.

"My name is Norgon. I command this trireme."

Hamilcar peered closer as a cresset of pine-knots on the quay alongside flared up in a sudden burst of yellow light.

"Norgon! Cast back, Norgon. Once, when you were a youth, there was a lad named Hamilcar, who rode with you in the armored horse. But that was before Hannibal marched from Spain—or before Hamilcar had sailed from Carthage—or before you



captained a trireme. Is it too far gone in the years for memory?"

The other bent forward in his turn, and the two fierce, hawk-nosed faces frowned from under the helmets' rims.

"I remember Hamilcar," answered the sailor slowly. "But he was young—and beardless."

"Look," bade the other. "That was a youth's age ago. By Astarte, friend, there is frost on your head as well as mine."

Norgon nodded almost wearily.

"It is true, Hamilcar. We have not grown younger, either of us. So you rode with Hannibal into Italy?"

"I led my troop of the Carthaginian horse out of Spain," answered Hamilcar moodily. "That was fifteen winters ago—a youth's age, as I said. And now I sail back to Carthage, captain of some four hundred Gaulish infantry—I, who was to be general over armies and Hannibal's right hand!"

The sailor's teeth showed in a wolfish grin of appreciation.

"Youth's ambitions! Who realizes them? There was a day I saw myself leading squadrons in a battle that should sweep Rome from the sea. And what happens? I sail a trireme to Bruttium to ferry Hamilcar's Gaulish infantry in the fleet that fetches home the wreckage of Hannibal's army to stand betwixt Carthage and Scipio. The gods will have none of us, old friend."

"They will have none of Carthage, either," exclaimed Hamilcar. "Even Hannibal has lost their favor. By the Ram, Norgon, this is a strange experience for some of us, who rode in the rout at Lake Trasimene and Cannæ, red to the bridles with Roman blood! It is a great night for the legions."

"Rome triumphs," assented Norgon. "There will be fighting yet, but not even Hannibal can avert the wreck—for Carthage is rotten, old friend, the senate think first of their own fortunes, last of the public good. There is jealousy of Hannibal. Watch what happens after the fleet returns. If Scipio does not take the city the senate will fall upon you of the Italian party and cast you by companies in the Byrsa cells."

Hamilcar rapped his sword-hilt on the rail.

"Let them try it! Do they think we will go to the furnaces like Nubian captives?"

"Ah, but they will set the city against you! They will divide you against each other. They will tell some of your generals that Hannibal has taken over-much credit, and so— But you know the tricks. Soldiers and sailors are of no use at politics, Hamilcar."

"I will have nothing to do with such tricks," fumed Hamilcar. "Sooner than be gulled by a set of fat-bellied merchants I—"

He broke off as the continued squealing of elephants was dominated by an angry trumpeting. Up the quay, where a giant quinquereme was berthed, arose a frantic babble of voices.

"There is trouble with the elephants," he said, leaning over the rail to peer into the darkness.

Norgon shrugged his shoulders.

"We have scant room for men. It is foolish to embark elephants when there are plenty at home."

"No, no, Hannibal is right," said Hamilcar. "Leave anything that is strange to them for the Romans to study, and they soon learn how to use it or counter it. We can not abandon the elephants."

He called down to an officer who was hurrying along the quay.

"What is wrong? Are men needed to handle the elephants?"

"No more men are needed," replied the officer. "One will not follow its mates aboard the quinquereme, and Baraka, the captain of the elephants, is taking it back to the stables."

"Is any one hurt?" asked Norgon.

"The General Hanno. I go for the physicians."

"Hanno!" exclaimed Hamilcar. "That is strange."

"Is this the Hanno who is called 'of the Sword?' " asked the sailor.

"Yes, he was in charge of embarking all troops. Gods, if he should meet his end through a sullen beast, he whom no steel could touch!"

Norgon signed himself with the crescent.

"I have heard of him. He has a wizard sword."

"I know not if it be a wizard sword," said Hamilcar; "but it is a sure blade, and a true. And of all of us who followed Hannibal from Spain Hanno has been foremost in every battle—and never a scratch to show for it. Still, I would rather die under steel than be smashed by an elephant."

They fell silent as a little procession of men passed up the quay.

"I should like to learn more of this," said Norgon. "How if we followed them? There is ample time."

Hamilcar tugged thoughtfully at his beard.

"Yes, there is no man in the army like Hanno—and no sword to compare with his. My Gauls are safely stowed below. So lead on, Norgon. How shall we go?"

The sailor raised a coil of rope from the base of the catapult and tossed it over the ship's side.

"A sailor can land this way," he replied. "And if a soldier can not, there is the gangplank in the waist."

Hamilcar slung his big shield on his back with a resounding clang.

"A soldier can follow anywhere a sailor he has ridden with of old," he growled.

A moment afterward they were striding together up the quay, threading a path between parties of soldiers, slaves loading stores and troops of frightened horses. Away in the distance they heard again the angry trumpeting of the elephant.

"After all," quoth Norgon, "a wizard sword can not keep a man from death for ever."

"Perhaps," agreed the soldier, "but it has its uses."

They had almost caught up with the group surrounding the injured officer when a tall figure in gilded mail stepped directly in front of the litter-bearers.

"Hannibal," murmured Hamilcar.

The Iberian slingers who carried Hanno halted, and their officer, a dissipated-looking Greek, came to the salute. But Hannibal paid no heed to them. He had eyes only for the limp body the Iberians carried shoulder-high, and at a word from him they lowered their burden gently to the stones, while he stooped over it. A mutter of voices came faintly to Hamilcar and Norgon, then Hannibal rose quickly and delivered a curt order to the Greek mercenary.

"To the Temple of Juno," he said. "In all things do as Hanno bids you."

The next moment he was gone, his face very sad and white in the torchlight, his broad shoulders braced back as if with the physical exertion of supporting his responsibilities.

"So that is Hannibal!" commented Norgon as the Iberians lifted the litter and continued on their way. "Gods! He has aged no less than we. Well, what next?"

Hamilcar was staring after the litter.

"Some one must fall heir to that sword," the soldier reflected aloud.

"And why not you?" gibed Norgon. "Or I, eh?"

"Why not?" echoed Hamilcar. "I—We are old, but with the gods' favor—and that sword— Come, it is worth trying!"

"Anything is worth a trial in defeat,"

endorsed the sailor. "But why carry a dying man to the Temple of Juno?"

The soldier knit his brows, puzzled.

"I do not know, unless— Ha, yes, Hannibal has reared there tablets of bronze inscribed with the names of his victories, the towns he has taken, the provinces he has ravaged and subdued, the consuls he has humbled. And Hanno, like the old lion he is, will die in the shadow of the great deeds he helped to perform."

Norgon's features twisted as if with pain.

"Great deeds," he repeated. "And for what purpose? Rome triumphs, despite them."

"Yet it is not we who have fought with Hannibal who must own shame," cried Hamilcar. "The legions have never seen *our* backs."

"That is the shame of it," answered Norgon. "Fourteen campaigns has Hannibal waged, undefeated. And now he must leave Italy because Carthage is too weak to stand without him. Carthage defeats him, I say, not Rome!"

"I would I might never see Carthage again," scowled the soldier.

"Moloch hear me, but I feel as you! But what next?"

"The sword!"

"Jackals' work, but jackals we are, old men who have failed. Come, then!" A note of hopefulness rang in his voice. "Perhaps we shall have to fight the Iberians."

"Those fellows!" snorted Hamilcar. "I know Colchus, that Greek who commands them. Leave them to me! We are not mercenaries."

ON THE steps of the temple they met Colchus and his Iberians descending, and the Greek hailed Hamilcar with an amused leer.

"So the sword draws you, too, old wolf!"

"Have you a better right to it?" growled the Carthaginian.

"There are two of us, Greek," added Norgon.

"Two or twenty, I care not," answered Colchus coolly. "Hannibal bade me see that Hanno passed as he wished; and he wishes to pass, undisturbed, here in the temple."

The Carthaginians stepped back, crestfallen.

"Oh, if Hannibal will have the sword it is not for us to push forward," grumbled Hamilcar.

"Not he," denied the Greek. "But the plain truth is that Hanno is of no mind to yield it up so long as he has strength to hold it. He would have us set him down under those tablets Hannibal placed above the altar, and there he lies, pulp from the thighs down, the sword in his hand. 'I am finished,' he said. 'Send away the physicians. But perhaps I can last until the Romans come, and if the gods will *that*, I would face them armed.' Yes, Hamilcar, to Hannibal he said: 'Grieve not. I would rather end so. And it is fitting I should hold the army's rear. It will seem like old days when we lured Sempronius to the shambles at the Trebia.' He—Hannibal—could have wept, I think."

"A man to share deck-room with, this Hanno," remarked Norgon.

"Honor to him," rumbled Hamilcar. "He is luckier than we, who may live to wear Roman chains."

"He who lives, lives," said Colchus cynically. "Better be a horse-boy alive than a king and dead. But as to this sword—"

"No, no," protested Hamilcar, "I will be first to defend Hanno's right to it. Tanit send me a like death!"

The Greek shuddered.

"A poor prayer, my friend. Death comes, in any case. But you mistook me. What I would say is that Hanno's life ebbs fast. By morning he will have no more need for his sword, and then—"

"Why, then," rasped Norgon, "the best man who claims it will have it."

"Something like that," agreed the Greek. "But by Hercules, three claimants are enough. We shall do nobody a service if we spread the news. Now, I suggest that we tarry patiently against the morning's coming, and when the gods have accepted Hanno's spirit we poor mortals, betwixt us, one way or another, can arrange who shall inherit Hanno's sword."

Hamilcar looked questioningly at Norgon.

"My ship can do without me," said the sailor slowly.

"And so can my Gauls," affirmed Hamilcar. "We shall soon be bound fast to your decks, eh? And there should be luck in this sword."

"Luck?" grumbled Norgon. "Humph, if to be crushed by an elephant is luck! But I own to a wish to see so strange a blade. And at the least, a man may say with truth that he would be honored to possess the sword of Hanno."

"Honor is often luck, and luck is usually honorable," said Colchus, chuckling. "Shall we pour a libation to the gods in Hanno's behalf—and perhaps each man for himself? I know a wine-shop behind here in the Street of the Rhodians where they had some sound Carian this noon. There may be a skin or two left."

Norgon ran his tongue over sun-dried lips.

"Now, that is a suggestion surpassing all else you have said, Greek," proclaimed the sailor. "Wine? By the Ram, let us seek it out!"

"A man never knows when he may drink again," said Hamilcar. "Lead, Colchus. We must take all we can with us. Bah! What else is left to us but to drink?"

"You are not happy," answered Colchus, with a shrug. "He who is unhappy should drink deep. But let me post my Iberians. They will keep the sword safe for us. And afterward we can decide who shall have it. He must be a deep drinker, for the sword has drunk deep. Yes, it is always thirsty—like a young maid for love, Hanno said. He is a droll fellow, Hanno, lying there with his crushed legs and the gray sword he can scarcely lift. He says he is thinking of the lives it has taken. 'I accustom myself to the company of ghosts as I wait to hail Charon's bark.' He has as pleasant thoughts as Hamilcar."

"He knows a man's death is not worth considering when a whole nation drifts toward death," replied Hamilcar.

"He knows death is the surest of messengers," said Norgon. "Yes, yes, he would be a good shipmate, this Hanno. Why fear the unescapable? If the sword could not protect him—"

"Yet the three of us seek the sword," jeered Colchus. "For myself, comrades, I hold that no man welcomes death before he must. Until the shadow falls life savors sweet on the tongue, and if a certain sword will win me one more kiss or another cup of wine I'll slay my shield-mate to have it."

"Humph," growled Hamilcar, "we are warned in time."

And the sailor menaced the Greek—

"Remember, there are two of us!"

"It would seem the advantage is on your side," grinned Colchus.

CHOKING and sputtering as the water sluiced through his beard, Hamilcar pulled himself up on the bench.

"Brrr! Squolsh! Has that Greek— May the Furies—"

"Yes, all drunk as Greeks," answered a voice like the edge of a saw. "Ha, it is good for you Hannibal is not here! An empty town—except for a handful of neighing Iberians—and an elephant and drunkards! Ill work, I say. Phaugh! Drunk as Greeks, and the three of you officers!"

Blinking the water from his bleary eyes, Hamilcar peered unsteadily across the table at a little, bow-legged man in the light brass breastplate and helmet of the Numidian Horse, whose flatness of nose and kinky locks betrayed the half-breed.

"Hold your tongue," snarled Hamilcar. "Are you always free with your betters?"

"If you are my better, you will have to prove it," said the little, bow-legged man composedly. "Who are you?"

"I am Hamilcar, of the Gaulish infantry."

"And I am Mago, of the Numidians. Why did you not send to warn me when the fleet sailed?"

Hamilcar staggered to his feet, amazed, and for the first time perceived his two companions huddled amongst the floor-rushes. The sailor was snoring audibly.

" 'The fleet sailed!' " he repeated dumbly. "When?"

The little, bow-legged man lifted his eyebrows.

"When? The Iberians say it was on the verge of dawn. It seems there was a sudden alarm—a trireme came in with word the Roman fleet was off Tagentum—and our people were away as swiftly as they could fend oars." Indignation grated in the thin voice. "Baal's wrath, it was not like Hannibal to flee without giving the outposts time to draw in! Here am I left with close to three hundred men, and not a ship for the lot of us."

Hamilcar propped his aching brow on one hand, and tried to think.

"It must have been sudden," he groaned. "Last night there was no intent to sail before dawn. We—the three of us stopped for a drink—to pour a libation—"

"To guzzle a vintage!" rapped the little Numidian. "What am I to do with my men? The Romans are fond of us Numidians! Well, what do you say? Don't sit there like an offering on the altar!"

The word "altar" reminded Hamilcar of Hanno—and the sword.

"What of Hanno?" he asked eagerly. "The General Hanno, fool! He lies in the Temple of Juno—"

The Numidian whistled softly.

"So that was why the Iberians were posted there! They would not let me in without their officer's permission, sent me here to find him. So Hanno was left to command us? That's not so bad. He—"

"No, no," exclaimed Hamilcar impatiently. "He is dying—or dead. An elephant crushed him, and Hannibal ordered him left in the temple. It was his wish."

"Was that why Baraka, the Captain of the Elephants, was left, too?" demanded Mago. "He waxed sullen when I called to him as we passed the barracks, said something about one of his beasts being mad."

"How should I know?" answered Hamilcar. "Gods, what a mad business! Is it to be wondered that an elephant should go *must?*"

He dragged himself to a window whence he had a view of the bay, sapphire-blue against the green of the shore slopes—and empty! Not a ship, not a sail, near at hand or within the scope of the horizon's band. A few people moved in the sunny streets, a troop of Numidians were picketed at the next corner. In rear of the temple stood a brace of the Iberian sentries Colchus had posted before they began their carouse.

"The wreck of the wreck of an army," he muttered.

"What?" snapped Mago.

But Hamilcar ignored the question.

"Is there more water? Help me with these others. Make haste, man! We have scant time. If the Romans learn of this our lives will not be worth a broken javelin."

The Numidian picked up a big, brown amphora from the floor and sprayed a stream of water on Norgon's head. Hamilcar fell to work on the Greek. The sailor came to first, groaning and belching windily, presently cursing and complaining; but Colchus must be pummeled as well as soaked before his sodden wits threw off the effects of the wine.

"Drunk as Greeks," complained the little, bow-legged horseman as he labored over Norgon. "A woman could have slain the three of you as you lay here."

"Only one Greek," said Norgon with drunken gravity. "Two Carthaginians, one Greek, all three drunk—drunk as—drunk as Romans."

"Where's—sword?" asked Colchus abruptly.

He swayed to his feet.

"You get sword, Hamilcar?" he pressed.

"Hanno still has the sword," replied the Carthaginian, "and your Iberians mount their guard. Come, friends, let us go to him, and ask his advice. If he lives, that is."

"Why — ask — advice?" challenged the Greek. "Take sword—that's all."

Hamilcar explained their plight, and Colchus sobered as if a keen wind had blown through his brain and cleansed it of the night's vapors.

"Great Hector, this is bad! The fleet gone—and the Romans beyond those hills. How close, Mago?"

"No legions nearer than Venosa," said the Numidian; "but horse—" he waved a hand vaguely—"who can say? Anywhere out there."

"Perhaps we can find a ship," spoke up Norgon hopefully. "I am a sailor, my friends, I can sail a ship for you—"

"There may be a fishing-boat or two on the beach," said the Numidian bruskly; "but everything that would keep afloat sailed with Hannibal. All the townsfolk went who might be accused of friendliness with us. Forget the sea. We can not take to it, if we wish."

There was an interval of silence, and in the midst of it the stamping hoofs of the horses at the corner beat like distant drums. A bee buzzed in and out the window.

Colchus reached under the table and dragged out a flabby wine-skin.

"Here's a drop to settle our stomachs," he said casually. "Well, why be cast down? All Italy is in front of us."

"If we can ever wriggle out of Bruttium," returned Hamilcar.

The Numidian nodded approval.

"Yes, yes, we are in the heel of the sack here. If we are to break free we must have elbow-room."

Norgon stared at the three of them, aghast.

"You are out of your minds! What hope for us is there in Italy? Gods, it stretches away for hundreds and hundreds of stadia, long and lean like an Iberian. We are down in his foot. Will the Romans let us escape clear up his leg?"

"Who can say what the Romans will do?" retorted Colchus. "But we can say this, comrades: They are not so well-loved in Italy, are they?"

"My Numidians know the hills like their own deserts," added Mago. "We have raided in every province for fourteen summers, now. But he was right who said we should seek Hanno's advice. Hanno of the Sword is the general for me—after Hannibal. Ha, many is the time I have followed him in the slaughter, him and his Gray Maid!"

"So you know the sword, too!" commented Colchus.

"Who does not? The best blade ever forged, men say. Wizards wrought it. He who wields it need never fear steel."

"But it is of no avail against an elephant afraid of a gang-plank," amended the Greek. "And now there are four of us to heir Hanno!"

The Numidian looked puzzled.

"I have no claim to it." He shook his head. "The spirits protect me! The sword is not my weapon. I fight with bow and javelin."

"He is right," said Hamilcar. "Well, have we talked enough? Here, give me that skin, Colchus! The man might have thirsted a week. Will you drink, Mago? No? Then one draught to cleanse my mouth. The rest is yours, Norgon. A monster, this one; he could drain the sea! I am full of wine-courage, friends. Let us see what the wreck of a wrecked army can accomplish. If Hanno yet lives, he is the man to relish such an undertaking. Come, Colchus, and pass us through your Iberians."

"I come," countered the Greek grimly. "The sword is *my* weapon. By Hercules, though, I am glad Mago is neutral in this matter. Two to one are sufficient odds."

THE Iberian sentries stood aside from the temple door with a dry rattle of missile-pouches as the four officers tramped across the pillared porch.

"A gloomy place to die," grunted Mago, then corrected himself at sight of the interior, lofty and spacious, the altar opposite the door bathed in sunlight that flooded down from an opening in the roof, "but a soldier could find a worse tomb."

"A tomb it is become," said Hamilcar, pointing to the still figure that lay on a heap of cloaks and hangings at the foot of the altar-steps.

The words echoed back from the marble walls, and a hand fluttered amongst the tumbled cloths. Eyes gleamed vividly in the leaden face. But the voice that answered Hamilcar seemed to come from a great distance.

"You, Colchus? And who else?"

The Greek stepped forward, suavely deferential, contriving a certain martial dignity, for all his wine-spotted cuirass and dingy helm and the floor-rushes in the folds of his kilt.

"Three of our captains, Hanno. We come to you for advice. The fleet is gone, and we left behind with a handful of men."

The eyes blazed brighter, the timbre of the far-off voice was more definite.

"Left! How chanced it? That is not like Hannibal."

"Why, Mago and his Numidians held the outposts, and there was no time to call them in." Colchus hesitated. "These others—bided with me."

The four had advanced closer to the altar's foot, and Hanno's eyes surveyed the two Carthaginians with a kind of satirical humor.

"They bided with you!" An uncanny touch of mockery in the feeble tones. "Did they drink with you?"

"Some while, yes," Colchus answered unwillingly.

"I thought so." The mockery was more pronounced. "By the Sword, I could wager Hannibal sent to withdraw you, Colchus, and you were not to be found. So your men were left—and these others. How are you called?" He addressed Hamilcar abruptly. "I have seen you, but your name—"

"I am Hamilcar. I hold a command in the Gaulish infantry. My friend Norgon is a captain in the triremes. He—came with me. We were curious about your accident."

"My accident!" The eyes twinkled with raillery. "It was not—my sword? I marked Colchus hungering for it—last night."

Hamilcar swallowed hard.

"Any man would wish to have Hanno's sword," he said stiffly.

"Humph! An honest man. But there are four of you."

"Mago says the sword is no weapon of his," replied Hamilcar. "We others—Well, when three men desire the same thing there is always a way to settle it."

Hanno's head shook ever so gently; his bloodless lips quirked into a smile.

"No man gains anything by fighting for this sword; it goes where it will. It is a wanderer."

His right hand fumbled in his cloak, and raised a long gray blade a few inches from the folds. The steel was marked with little whorls and wavy lines, and in it were etched letters and symbols in many tongues. It hovered in air for a breath or two, then sank again as his hand wavered beneath the weight. Tiny beads of sweat on his brow told of the effort he had made.

"I—weaken," he said irrelevantly.

There was silence while the four officers grouped around him stared down at his grizzled face and the shattered remnant of what had been a giant's frame.

"Heed me," he said at last. "If Hannibal is gone, I command here. When I am dead— Humph, let the sword command. You hear? He who has the sword commands. I know you captains, always jealous, always disputing with one another. So let the sword be arbiter. But never fight for it. Remember, it goes where it will."

The perspiration covered his whole face. Norgon stooped quickly, and offered him a little amphora of wine which rested on the altar-step. The dying man sipped a swallow, then motioned it away.

"There is no luck in the sword unless it comes to you of its own accord," he resumed. "So my father said, and *he* had it of a Roman in the sea-fight of the Ægates Isles; and the Roman had it of a Cretan pirate, and the pirate had it of a drowned man. But he—the Cretan—had known of it before, or so he said. It has a long history, old as human life, I think. Men have slain each other with it for ages. What tales it could tell!"

He took another swallow of the wine.

"They say it is a lucky sword. Well, of that you must judge. True, it kept me safe from steel's edge, as it kept my father and the Roman, and the Cretan and the man who was drowned. But all of us came by death in the ordinary course. Still, every man has his own idea of luck. But the sword's luck goes only to him who comes by it naturally. Fight for it, if you will. One of you will win, but the sword will not stay with him for that reason. No, no! Gamble for it, rather—and if it will have none of the winner, if by any mischance it goes to another, leave it with him, unless it seeks a new master."

The four who stood over him eyed one another uncertainly.

"But if we fight, Hanno," said Colchus, "it will be as much of a gamble for the sword as if we pitched knuckle-bones."

"You can not afford to sacrifice your lives in that fashion." The faint voice became stern. "It is for you four to carry your men safe out of Italy. And that will require the wits and craft and weapon-skill of every one of you."

"But how?" queried Hamilcar.

"Take to the mountains—the Numidians know every byway. Ride like the wind—and always north and west. Fight when you must, but flee when you can. In Apulia and Etruria the people are friendly to us, hostile to Rome. You can find friends elsewhere. When you reach the northern mountains cross into Gaul."

Hanno's voice was so low that they had all to bend down to hear it.

"But then?" asked Colchus.

"No, I can say no more. From Gaul you may reach Spain. Or, if Carthage is beaten, you might do better to take to yourselves wives in some far country of the North beyond reach of the Roman eagles. The sword will see you safe."

"Safe?" queried the Greek eagerly. "Did you say it would see us safe?"

Hanno's eyes lighted up once more with a gust of vitality.

"Not all. No, no, my Colchus, be reasonable. Men must die to carry some of you safe, but safe some of you will be—if you follow the sword."

Hamilcar bent closer to the general.

"Give it to one of us," he urged. "Give the sword to one of us for a sign."

The grizzled head rolled in negation.

"The sword goes where it will. That is how to make sure of its luck. Gamble for it. Follow whoever wins it. And if it leaves you altogether, forget it. You can not compel it. Remember that. It comes to a man, and fights for him. Sometimes it will fight for his son, and his son's sons. But it stays with no man longer than it lists."

"But if it goes to a Roman?" cried Norgon.

"It came from a Roman. If it wishes to, it will return to a Roman."

The sweat was heavy as dew all over Hanno's face. His voice choked.

"Lift me," he ordered abruptly. "Yes, by the arms, two of you. Face me— Where are those tablets? The tablets Hannibal set up for the Romans? My eyes are dim. Show me."

Colchus and Norgon raised him; Hamilcar turned his lolling head toward the angular lines of Punic lettering erected on the altar. The little bow-legged Numidian was crying.

"Is my sword in my hand?" asked Hanno. "Leave it to me—while I live—or I will set a curse upon you all. Ha, the light grows better! I see the tablets, now— *The Trebia—forty thousand Romans slain; Trasimene—the Consul Flaminius killed—fifteen thousand Romans slain, twenty thousand taken; Cannæ—seventy-two thousand Romans slain or taken of eighty-seven thousand—* The light grows dim again— Who said Hannibal was beaten? No, no, Carthage is beaten—Rome is beaten—never Hannibal —Ho, Keepers of the Underworld, a place for Hanno! I am weary of victory."

MAGO brandished a javelin at the statue of the goddess behind the altar, brooding and aloof.

"How could a man live in the shadow of that stone witch?" shrilled the half-breed. "Let us destroy it!"

But Colchus waved him back.

"You err, friend. It was an elephant, not a statue, destroyed Hanno. And this temple he would have for tomb, even as Hannibal left it. What we came for was the sword."

The Greek's hand hovered toward the plain hilt of the weapon that Hanno's fingers clutched in a grip that impressed the silver-wire binding upon the stiffening flesh. But Hamilcar thrust him aside.

"You are hasty," rebuked the Carthaginian. "Have you forgotten so soon the injunction Hanno laid upon us?"

"Yes, yes," assented Norgon. "Not so fast, Greek, not so fast. Gamble for it, said Hanno."

"What harm to try its balance?" scowled Colchus. "But have your way. How will you gamble for it?"

"So," answered Hamilcar, and he plucked a handful of floor-rushes from the folds of the Greek's kilt. "Here, Mago, you will have none of the sword, you say?"

"The sword is not my weapon," returned Mago doggedly. "And whatever you say or Hanno thought, I think there is bad luck in this sword."

"What you think is of no account," Colchus snapped ill-temperedly. "This affair lies between us three. We—we are white men."

"White or black, all men must die," said the Numidian serenely; "and I think, too, that he who keeps away from that sword will live longer than those who are tempted to it."

"Very possibly," interposed Hamilcar; "but death owes none of us anything; we have played with it too long. As for Mago, if he is good enough to command Numidians he is good enough to fight beside me. So I suggest that we give him these rushes to hold. Each of us three shall draw one from his hand, and he who has the longest shall have the sword."

"A fair device," approved Norgon.

Colchus gulped down a curse.

"There is no skill in drawing a rush by chance," he objected.

"No, it is an honest gamble such as Hanno had in mind," Hamilcar agreed smoothly. "But if you wish, Colchus, you may have the first draw."

"Yes, let him have the first draw," rumbled Norgon.

The Greek hesitated, then snatched at the three rushes projecting from Mago's clenched fist.

"It is not very long," he said dazedly.

"Not so long as this, by Tanit's help," said Norgon, drawing his rush in obedience to a gesture from Hamilcar.

"But longer than the third," said Mago, opening his hand to reveal Hamilcar's.

Colchus cursed openly, but Hamilcar clapped Norgon on the back.

"You win. Ha, a sailor, you shall command soldiers! The hills shall be your sea, old friend. Take up the sword. Go on! Hanno would have wished it so."

Mago nodded approval of this.

"Luck won him the sword, whether it be good luck or bad luck. But what happens if Norgon is slain? Who has the sword, then?"

"Why, we can draw again," offered Hamilcar.

But Colchus objected vigorously

"Not so. Let whoever first reaches the dead man's side take the sword. That is the fairest way to permit the sword to choose a master."

Hamilcar shrugged his massive shoulders.

"I am content; but it is my hope that we shall need no fresh master for the sword. Come, take it up, Norgon."

The sailor stooped and gently unfastened the dead fingers from the hilt. A great light shone in his face as he straightened himself, and swung the gray blade at arm's length.

"Gods, what a sword!" he exclaimed. "It is as if it were a part of me. It balances like a leaf in the air. And the edge! See!"

He dropped it flat across his arm, and razorwise, shaved the hairs off a patch above his wrist. Hamilcar pointed a trembling finger at the whorl-marked steel.

"There are marks on it. Other men have set their names to it, perhaps."

Colchus, craning closer, his envy momentarily forgotten, cried out at a certain symbol immediately under the hilt.

"That is Egyptian. By Hercules, it is a Pharaoh's mark! And beside it is the Egyptian Seft for sword. Ah, Norgon, great is your fortune! A king's sword should carve you a rich future."

The sailor grinned in embarrassment.

"For my future, I hope only that it will see me clear of Italy. I have had too intimate an acquaintance with oar-slaves to desire to spend my days rowing in a Roman trireme. But the morning wanes, friends, and we have to decide on our course. What are we to do?"

Nobody spoke for a considerable interval, and again through the silence sounded the stamping of the Numidians' horses outside and the buzzing of the bees.

"There are some few—drunkards," Mago stressed the word faintly— "scattered about the town, who might be flogged to willingness to bear arms. Also, there is Baraka and his elephant."

"That elephant has taken sufficient toll," protested Colchus.

"Nevertheless, an elephant is feared by the Romans," said Hamilcar; "and if this one is out of his mad fit he is safe to employ. How if we go to Baraka, and learn his mind concerning our plight—which is no less his plight?"

And as nobody answered:

"But Norgon commands us. It is for him to say what we do."

"I asked for advice, old friend," quoth the sailor; "and I am free to admit to you that I am accustomed to fighting afloat rather than ashore, and what is more, I know nothing of Italy, while you know it as I do the sea. So those who have advice, render it. Hamilcar has spoken. What say you, Colchus?"

"I say that it was a wise gamble for the sword which placed us under a leader who is ignorant how to conduct us to safety," rasped the Greek.

"Are you better informed?" snapped Hamilcar.

"If he is ignorant of Italy, he is willing to ask advice—and to fight beside Numidians," spoke up Mago.

"That am I," declared Norgon heartily.

"My advice," continued Mago, "is to mount every man you can, take Baraka and his elephant, and strike over the hills into Lucania before the Roman legions close in. We shall have to fight, as it is; but from Lucania we can work into Apulia, and so, with some help from the countryfolk, northward toward Etruria. That is as far as my mind sees today."

"And far enough," sneered the Greek. "For who ever heard of a Numidian who predicted the future! The man might be the Delphic Oracle!"

"What is your advice, then?" asked Norgon.

"Fight free of the Romans. What else is there to do?"

"And that is what Mago advised, although in more considered terms," remarked Hamilcar.

"It is all any man can advise," said the Numidian. "We are the spoil of luck, subject to the whims of that sword. It would be folly to plan far ahead. Talk to Baraka, Norgon, and if he agrees, then we can leave the town."

"And—this?"

Norgon pointed to the body of Hanno.

"Leave him," said Hamilcar. "It was his wish to receive the Romans when they enter."

"He mocks them as he lies," exclaimed Colchus in sudden awe.

A beam of sunlight from the roof trickled across the gaunt features, revealing the lips parted in a sinister grin of derision.

"They know more than we, the dead," murmured the Greek, awe turned to superstition. "Zeus guard us! Is it us he mocks, by any chance?"

No man answered him, but the four stole silently from the temple's echoing emptiness. It was as if a chill had fallen in the full tide of sunny noon.

BARAKA was a wispy, leathery bit of a man, with a white kilt around his loins and a tangled mass of lank black hair through which his eyes smoldered like hot coals. He was half Indian, offspring of a Sidonian mother and a Hindu mahout, sullen and aloof as one of his own beasts. He received the four officers at the entrance to a courtyard wherein the slayer of Hanno was picketed, vast rump swaying rhythmically as the pliant trunk conveyed bunch after bunch of hay into the cavity of the mouth, little eyes squinting with sidewise cunning at the visitors.

"Why should I go with you?" he answered disagreeably. "The Captain of the Elephants is important no longer. Hannibal sails away without even a thought for me!"

"I might say as much," returned Mago. "My Numidians were forgotten."

"Who would have expected you to hide yourself with a beast that had gone *must?*" demanded Colchus. "It serves you right."

The hot eyes sparked at the Greek.

"Nobody interfered when I calmed the Big One, and led him off before he might trumpet his way down the quay," retorted Baraka. "But that is the old story: A man is given respect while he is needed. Hannibal returns to Carthage, and the Captain of the Elephants is no longer necessary."

Hamilcar made a gesture of dissent.

"You have served under Hannibal as long as I, Baraka," he said. "You know as well as I that Hannibal never abandoned any faithful officer, if he could help himself. There was an alarm in the night. 'Roman galleys off the capes! The Roman fleet off Tagentum!' By the wrath of Moloch, who could stop to figure what each man did? 'Cast off,' ordered Hannibal, for what was left of the army was more valuable than you or I or that great idiot of a beast that waggles his tail like a Nubian dancing-girl."

"Was there no summons through the streets?" asked Mago.

"Oh, yes," Baraka admitted. "The quay-guards ran from door to door, and the trumpets blew twice. But naught was said of the Big One here—and was I to abandon him?"

"We are not suggesting that you abandon him," said Colchus.

"I am finished with the army," replied the Captain of the Elephants. "Hannibal left me here—and here will I stay, and the Big One with me."

"And bide the coming of the Romans?" inquired Hamilcar.

"Why not? I have faced Romans before today. They will have little sport out of me."

"But the Big One," said Norgon slyly. "He will fare ill at the Romans' hands."

A look of uncertainty clouded Baraka's face; the smoldering eyes lost some of their fire.

"I had not thought of that," he answered. "But the Big One can take care of himself. A whole cohort of Romans would not be able to harm him when he has on his armor."

"They would not try to harm him," said Hamilcar. "They would capture him, and learn from him the use of elephants in war, so that they might readily resist our elephants in the future. And that would mean the death of many elephants, Baraka."

The Captain of the Elephants shuffled his feet in the dust, more uncertain than ever.

"True," he conceded. "And you? What can you do for the Big One?"

"Why, if we succeed," replied Norgon, "we will break out of Italy into Gaul—"

"Across those snow-mountains?" Baraka was aghast. "Ah, my Big One's feet were cut to the quick by the ice! Take him through there again? Never!"

"Then will he become a chance for the Romans to learn how to master his brethren," insisted Hamilcar. "And afterward, probably, they will poison him."

Baraka's face became livid.

"Not while I live! First I will venture the snow-mountains with him. Yes, I will wrap his feet in hides. Some way I will get him through."

"But before we get him through the snow-mountains we must pass the length of Italy," Norgon reminded him. "And if that is to be done, we have no time to lose."

"It will not be I who delay you," shrilled Baraka. "Gather your men, and see if I am behind them when your trumpets sound!"

"So you come with us?"

"Come with you! What would you have me do? Stay, and assist these cursed Romans to slay elephants as they do Carthaginians? Bah! And though Hannibal left me, I may yet surprize him by guiding the Big One up the road to Byrsa one of these days. Let us escape from Italy, and it will be because the gods owe us no favor if we do not find a path into Spain or pick up a ship that can ferry us oversea."

Norgon hesitated.

"We have all taken pledge of loyalty to this sword," he said finally, exhibiting the lean gray blade. "It was Hanno's, and—"

Baraka cackled.

"I have heard of it! A wizard sword—which could not preserve its owner from the Big One's feet. Heh-heh! He tramples hard. Well, if you will follow it, I have nothing to say. Myself, I ride the Big One's back. The rest is for you to manage."

"We have agreed," explained Hamilcar, "that he who carries the sword shall be leader."

"Let him be," assented Baraka. "What have I to do with a sword? It is not my weapon. If I can not ride from Italy behind the Big One's ears, no sword will hew me a path."

Colchus exhaled a deep sigh of relief.

"Then it is still between the three of us!"

"You are not anxious for me to live long, my friends?" observed Norgon dryly.

Hamilcar shook his head, annoyed.

"This is a bad spirit for men in our position," he declared. "By Tanit, Colchus, our lot will not be improved if Norgon is slain. Forget the sword!"

Mago, the little, bow-legged Numidian, wagged his black face at the others.

"Who can forget the sword?" he reminded them. "It is like a god, for we trust in it and fear it—and my experience is that the gods are as likely to deal harm as good. That is the trouble with them: they do not act like men, so you can never be sure of them. But you have set up the sword to lead us, and therefore, I say, you must respect it, you three. You can not forget it, any more than you can forget the gods."

FROM the shelter of the cedars they had an unobstructed view of the valley below them, the deep, turgid brown of the river distinct between bands of greenery. The bridge at the foot of the hill on which they stood was barred by a mass of fallen trees on the farther side, and steel sparkled frequently in the opposite copses.

"I have marked two *vexilia,*" said Mago dolefully. "That would mean six hundred legionary cavalry, and there must be four hundred or more auxiliaries."

"And we are a scant four hundred men," grunted Norgon.

"And an elephant," added Colchus with his wonted cynicism.

Hamilcar tugged savagely at his beard.

"A crossing we must make or else turn about and set our backs to the sea and slay as many Romans as we may," growled the captain of Gaulish infantry.

"The legions are not up yet." Mago attempted encouragement. "And if we could once get an arrow-shot beyond those fellows over there we would be sure of gaining Lucania. I'd cross to the Tyrrhenian shore, and—"

"You might as well talk of crossing to the Punic shore," sneered Colchus.

But Norgon shook himself from the contemplative mood which had possessed him, and broke in upon the Greek.

"I have a thought, friends. At sea when we sight an enemy we close him to ram or board, unless he be too numerous. In that case, we endeavor to divide his ships, so that we may contrive to fall upon one division with a chance of conquering it. Now, here before us, as Mago has said, the Romans are twice as strong as we, and every moment that passes brings their supports nearer. If we are to pass the river we must pass at once."

"Hannibal, himself, could not be more inspired!" exclaimed Colchus sarcastically. "But I could have said as much in six words."

The sailor went on without noticing the interruption:

"And to pass the river we must trick the Romans into one place—and then come upon them unawares from another direction."

"That is a wise thought," endorsed Hamilcar.

"Colchus spoke more truly than he intended, perhaps," observed Mago, with a sour look at the Greek. "That is the kind of plan Hannibal used again and again. He would trick the Romans to mass their strength in one position, and after he had succeeded outflank them and throw us of the horse upon their rear. Whoo! Many a legion have I broken that way."

"Yes, yes," agreed Hamilcar, "on a level plain, all else being equal, I would back your Numidians, Mago, against twice, yes, and thrice, their number of Roman horse."

"But we are on one side of the river and the Romans on the other," pointed out Colchus. "Also, I see no level plain."

"If we can beat the Romans on the level we can beat them on the hillsides," declared Norgon. "How if we divide our forces thus? I will take Mago and his Numidians and the bulk of the Iberians, and ride down-stream around the next bend. In the meantime, Hamilcar and the rest, with Baraka and his elephant, must attack the bridge. And while they are occupying the Romans' attention, we will surprize a crossing and come down upon the Romans in flank and rear."

"It will be a pretty task for Hamilcar and his men," commented Colchus. "I am disposed to accompany Norgon."

"You are not necessary to me," answered Hamilcar bruskly. "Leave me a score of your slingers, and I will be content."

But Mago looked worried.

"You will have only some six score men, Hamilcar," objected the little cavalry officer.

"What of the elephant?" gibed Colchus.

"The elephant will be worth more in this affair than all the rest of us," replied Hamilcar. "Go on, Norgon. You need have no fears for us. We will develop an attack that will draw every Roman within five stadia of the bridge. To horse, Mago."

"Perhaps I should stay here," said Norgon uncertainly. "On my ship I always knew where I should stand in a fight, but ashore—"

"You should stay where you will be safest," advised Colchus. "But I was forgetting the sword. You have no occasion to be concerned."

Mago snorted contemptuously, and Hamilcar answered the sailor:

"We who retain her can not clinch the victory, old friend. That is for Mago's column, and the commander's place is where the victory is to be won."

Norgon stared down at the tumbling brown water, and shivered slightly.

"After all, I am to fight in my own element," he said. "But I could never abide fresh water. There is no kindliness to it."

"Trust to the sword," said Hamilcar lightly. "It will lead you safe."

HAMILCAR allowed an ample time for Norgon to reach the cart-track which paralleled the river, and then sent forward his slingers and a half-dozen Cretan archers he had dug from the wine-shops and brothels of Bruttium along with a few score mingled spearmen and sworders, Carthaginian heavy infantry, Gauls, Iberians, Libyans. The slingers, from the river-bank, employed their long-range slings, casting leaden balls at the enemy on the hill-slopes, while the archers raked the approaches to the bridge. Few as the missile-troops were, the viciousness of their attack and the boldness with which they descended to the river-bank completely distracted the attention of the Romans, who rapidly concentrated at the bridge-head, even dismounting a portion of their legionary cavalry in preparation to meet the anticipated attempt to force a passage.

Several bow-shots distant, in the shelter of a clump of trees, Hamilcar formed his handful of dismounted infantry, less than a hundred in all, but hardened soldiers to a man, typical of the disciplined mercenaries who were dreaded by the most veteran Roman legions. In advance of them he stationed the elephant, with Baraka mounted on the beast's back. And a fearsome sight was the Big One, arrayed in his battle-armor, frontlet of plate-mail covering skull and trunk, padded saddle-cloth hanging from his flanks, with sheets of chain-mail pendant from the howdah on his back and sheltering his vitals. Baraka, perched on the beast's neck, wore a light shirt of chain-mail and a peaked helmet; but the only weapon he carried was the ankus with which he guided his charge. In the howdah were four of the Cretan bowmen.

Hamilcar waited until he judged his missile-troops were likely to reveal their weakness, and shouted to Baraka to rush the bridge with the elephant. The ankus tickled the beast's tough hide, his master's voice urged him on, and the Big One lumbered down the road in the midst of a cloud of dust that might have been stirred by a thousand men. Simultaneously, the slingers abandoned their long-range weapons, and took to the clumsier slings they employed for short-range work, casting stones the size of a clenched fist with a drive that knocked armored men completely off their feet.

The Romans, dazed by the cloud of dust and the hail of missiles falling on the bridge-head, closed the gaps in their ranks, and formed closely across the road, just in time to receive the terrible impact of the Big One's charge. A score of men were crushed under the immense feet or hurled to destruction by the flailing trunk; the Cretan archers aimed their shafts right and left. But the Romans refused to retreat. They saw their comrades ground to red paste, and stepped into the ranks to meet a similar fate.

In the midst of this boiling uproar Hamilcar launched his infantry at the shattered barricade at the bridge-end, He crossed the structure unopposed, but notwithstanding their terror of the elephant, the Romans came at him resolutely on horseback and afoot, so that he was obliged to shift his formation to a compact circle, which wheeled slowly from right to left, with the effect of presenting the attacking troops with a constantly varied succession of opponents.

The Carthaginians' weapons were soon red to shaft and hilt, their shields were hacked and marred, their numbers were reduced a third. Baraka succored them twice, charging through and through their attackers and giving them a momentary interval of rest. But presently he was obliged to protect himself, for the Romans leaped from their horses and ran at the Big One, reckless of death if they might hamstring a leg or thrust a spear up under the protecting drapery of the saddle-cloth and the flaps of chain-mail. And Hamilcar knew that he had exhausted his opportunity. A howl from Baraka sent the Big One crashing into the woods out of reach of pricks and slashes, and the little band of mercenaries were left to hold their own.

The dismounted Romans drew back, and a column of legionary cavalry was formed to ride down the Carthaginians. The Roman trumpeter had his instrument to his lips when another trumpet blew in the woods above the bridge. Baraka's howl became a yell of exultation. Hoofs thundered in the tree-aisles, and the Numidian horse burst into the open, behind them Colchus' Iberians, casting middle-size pebbles from the waist-slings which they used for ordinary work. The Big One rushed into view again, trumpeting madly in response to the blasts of the Numidians.

"Forward," cried Hamilcar, and his infantry trudged out from the bridge-head, shields braced and chins up, doing their share anew to break the Roman array.

At the edge of the trees presently, where the road wound away out of sight into the purple hills, Hamilcar caught up with Colchus, who was wiping his sword on a handful of grass.

"Mago has ridden on after them," said the Greek casually. "It was best to disperse them while we had the chance."

"But Norgon?" panted Hamilcar. "Where—"

Colchus held out the sword in his hand at arm's-length and surveyed it critically, and Hamilcar recognized the familiar gray sheen of the steel.

"It was too bad about Norgon," answered Colchus. "Too bad! He couldn't swim."

"Not swim! But—"

"It was the river, you see. We had to cross where it was deep and swift, and he—"

Hamilcar's hand fastened on his own sword.

"Did you try to save him?" he demanded.

"Try?" The Greek's eyebrows rose. "Why not? Only think, my friend! Mago was there, and several hundred others. It would have looked well, would it not, had I seemed loath to haul Norgon out? But the truth is that I and one of my Iberians and three Numidians went after him, but he slipped from his horse's back, and when we finally reached him he was dead."

Hamilcar's hand opened and shut spasmodically on the hilt of his red blade.

"You were—first?"

"I was, as witness this sword." And with satisfaction he proceeded: "It is evident that I was destined to possess it. Why, Norgon had it scarcely a day, eh? Ah, yes, it was intended for me."

"Take care, lest it leave you as swiftly as it left Norgon," snarled Hamilcar.

"No, no," retorted Colchus cheerfully. "I intend to be careful. It is all very well to have a wizard-sword, but I don't mean to place too heavy a burden on it. The gods will do much for a man, but they expect him to do something to save his own head. Now, Norgon was a good cupmate and a fine companion, but—"

"He was my friend," warned Hamilcar. "Let that suffice."

"And a shipman. Therefore he could not

swim," added the Greek mockingly. "But he is dead, so—Zeus be his friend! We live. I hold the sword. Do you recall our compact?"

Hamilcar tugged hard at his beard.

"I do," he answered slowly. "I am one to keep a compact. You are chief. What will you have of me?"

Colchus slapped the gray sword into its sheath.

"First, a disposition to believe well of a fortunate friend who could not have helped his fortune had he wished to, which I am bound to say— But my topic is not congenial to you. Very good! I suggest, then, that we collect our men and as many Roman horses as possible, and press on after Mago. The road is open to Lucania, but the man who does not seize his opportunity when it comes— Ah, the forbidden topic again! Suppose that we agree simply to continue after Mago? It was his recommendation."

THE girl fled from the gate in a flutter of ragged brown garments, white limbs glancing in the sunshine. They had a brief glimpse of her traversing the vineyard, but the olive-trees beyond swallowed her completely. The same drowsy stillness settled again upon the weathered farm buildings and dusty fields.

Colchus caressed his chin and straightened in his saddle. Days of command had lent him an air of power.

"A fat place," he observed. "It would be well if we halted here. There should be meat for the men and grain for the horses—yes, even hay in plenty for Baraka's pet."

But Mago offered a decided negative.

"Hascar's troop that I sent ahead report the road clear. It would be foolish to delay. By tomorrow we shall be in the Etrurian foothills."

"Why hurry so?" complained Colchus petulantly.

He peered back along the jogging ranks of the Numidians, thinned by weeks of marching and fighting, privation and illness, to where the Big One ambled sedately like a mound in motion under his thick coating of dust. And behind the Big One lay the quiet farmstead and the orchards in which the girl had vanished as soon as they had noticed her. Not a human soul was in sight of the column. Above on either hand rose the Sabine hills, lush-green foliage streaked with the brown bars of the tilled fields or the petaled loveliness of orchards. But nowhere was there sign of man, woman or child, no, not so much as the smoke of a deserted hearth. The fertile country was vacant, abandoned, although the sudden discovery of the girl lurking under cover of the farm-gate might be taken to prove the contrary.

"That cohort we whipped on the wooded hill must be a long day's march rearward. There's not a Roman nearer than they."

"Ah, but these Sabine folk are unfriendly," answered Hamilcar, who had ridden up from his motley company of mounted infantry. "This is very different from Apulia, where the villages clamored to feed us."

"Perhaps," Colchus agreed reluctantly. "But that girl—a hamadryad, by Aphrodite! She gave me a look."

"How often have we urged you to leave women alone?" growled Hamilcar.

Mago, being a Numidian half-breed, rumbled a less polite comment into his woolly beard.

Colchus only grinned at both of them, and deliberately shortened his reins.

"It is not I, my friends, but they! There is something about a Greek—"

"Yes, a vanity as great as the Big One," snapped Hamilcar. "Have you forgotten the woman in the village beyond Venosia—and that was Apulia! —whose husband—"

"A mischance, my Hamilcar! Such little tragedies befall all of us. Come, come, are you jealous?"

Hamilcar smothered a curse.

"I beseech you to use your wits, for your own sake, if not for the rest of us. That is all. Remember, you are chief."

"And it is a pity if a chief can not have a few privileges," retorted the Greek.

"For example, turning aside from the road to try the knife of some chance-met Sabine girl," remarked Mago.

"Why not?" Colchus grinned broader than ever. "By Hercules, this is a dull life! Ride, fight, ride, fight! Now, I caught a glint in that wench's eye that augured—"

"Are you going after her?" demanded Hamilcar.

"I am, my Hamilcar. And before you have traveled another four stadia I shall be up with you again, richer in experience and happier in spirit."

"Let him go," advised Mago. "It is his own responsibility."

"But he is chief," persisted Hamilcar, "and I, for one, have felt eyes watching us all day from the hillsides."

"What Sabine farmer can harm me?" laughed Colchus.

He touched the hilt of the gray sword.

"Have I been behindhand when the steel was singing, friends? Say, who led in every bicker since we broke out of Bruttium? Whose blade has been the most merciless? Whose head has been oftenest imperiled? Eh?"

"It is true," Hamilcar admitted unwillingly. "By the anger of Moloch, I never saw a man pass through such onfalls as he, Mago! And no steel could touch him."

"Humph," grunted Mago. "Hanno died and so did Norgon."

"I shall not encounter an elephant on a Sabine farm nor attempt to swim a river," replied Colchus, reining out of the column. "Continue, friends. I shall be with you again before you have tired of discussing my recklessness."

He touched spurs to his horse, and cantered down the long line of Numidians and mounted infantry, waved to Baraka high up behind the Big One's flapping ears, and rounded a curve in the white track of the road.

"Talk to a jackdaw, talk to a Greek," commented Mago.

"He is a good fool," answered Hamilcar. "Let us be fair. We have had brave leadership from him."

"No man is a good leader who turns aside from his comrades to pursue an enemy's woman," denied Mago.

They rode on in silence, the trees beside the way whispering gently in the breeze, the sun striking warm on the ribbon of the road, the country becoming wilder and more mountainous as they advanced, for they were heading into the ridge of the Apennines which separated Sabinia from Etruria. No longer were there cultivated fields and orchards on either hand, and the few habitations they saw were herders' cottages high up in the hills. Hamilcar lost the sense of being under the constant observation of unseen eyes, but his uneasiness increased, and at a crossroads where the track forked in different directions he came to an abrupt halt.

"It may be that I am as much of a fool as Colchus," he announced; "but I can not continue without him. Suffer me to take a troop of your men, Mago, and I will fetch him back."

The little Numidian squinted his yellow eyes toward the tail of the column.

"We have gone a good four stadia," he returned. "He should be up with us. But if aught has happened to him it is his own fault. Let him go, Hamilcar."

"You forget the sword," the Carthaginian reminded him.

"It would be well for you if you forgot the sword," snapped Mago. "You do not require a sword to be chief."

"Hanno said the sword should lead us safe from Italy," insisted Hamilcar. "And it is a good blade. You have seen it flash in the thick of the slaughter."

"And I saw Colchus take it from the hand of a drowned man," replied Mago. "Oh, well, have your way! You are as crazy as Colchus. I will wait here for you—and if we are delayed we must make a night-march."

"I will not delay you long," promised Hamilcar.

The Carthaginian ordered the rear troop of Numidians to wheel out of the column, and led them back at a gallop; but as he reached the Big One he moderated his pace, and hailed Baraka, sitting astride the thick neck, disgruntled and sullen.

"Did you mark what became of Colchus after he left us?"

"I looked back once," answered Baraka. "He was riding into the yard of that farm we passed."

"Then he was not trapped on the road," Hamilcar muttered to himself, and spurred his horse on.

Two score men, riding with loose reins, made short work of the distance the column had traveled so slowly. The buildings of the farm showed through the roadside trees, and at the entrance-gate the hoofmarks of the Greek's horse were plainly cut on a plot of turf. Hamilcar followed the hoofmarks to the housedoor, where Colchus appeared to have dismounted; but the hoofmarks continued on around the house into a rear yard rimmed by barns and sheds. The door of one barn stood open, and a Numidian officer, who rode beside Hamilcar, pointed to the print of sandals on the earthen sill—and close by was the unmistakable imprint of a naked foot, a woman's foot, slender in the heel.

"Ho, Colchus!" called Hamilcar.

No answer.

"Colchus! It is we, your comrades!"

And again:

"Colchus! Hamilcar calls."

The Numidians stirred restlessly, and Hamilcar vaulted down from his saddle.

"It is strange," he muttered, and peered into the barn's shadowy interior.

The sunlight dappled the earthfloor a spear's length inside the door; beyond that was darkness, a vista of wooden-wheeled wains, ox-yokes, tools, heaps of fodder, and overhead a tangle of beams. From one of the beams dangled a dark object, which swayed and turned continually—a sack? Hamilcar asked himself. A slab of salt meat? No, too large.

The Carthaginian stepped across the sill, and started violently. The hanging object was a man.

"A file of troopers hither!" he called harshly. "Quick!"

The Numidians scrambled from their horses, and pelted in after him, bows bent, javelins poised. But all they saw was a dead man, swaying and turning at the end of a rope that hung from a roofbeam.

"Make a light," ordered Hamilcar.

An under officer took touchwood from a brass firebox, blew it alight and kindled a wisp of hay, and as the flame torched it was reflected dully on a gray shaft embedded in the dead man's chest.

"Higher," commanded Hamilcar. "Lift the flame higher. Yes, it is he."

For the light fell on the face of Colchus, a face distorted and askew, black with congested blood, dragged over to one side by the loop around his neck, the knot tight under one ear. In the Greek's chest was buried the sword of Hanno.

"Slain by his own sword!" exclaimed Hamilcar. "But no, that is not possible. He came in—with the girl—" the Carthaginian stooped to the floor—"yes, here is her footprint again—he came in with her—they dropped a loop from above—she guided him into it. Gods! What an end. To be strangled to death in a Sabine barn for a farm-wench! A wench who lured him to his death. And they buried his own sword in his breast as he kicked at the rope! Buried it in mockery."

Hamilcar put his hand to the hilt and sought to draw it forth, but the blade was caught between the ribs and it resisted him. He stepped back.

"Sword, sword," he said, "you have much to answer for. Three men who have carried you are dead—and the Gods only know how many owners died before them! Good luck, they call you. I wonder! Yes, I think I will leave you."

One of the Numidians nudged his elbow, suggesting that they set the farmstead alight; but Hamilcar shook his head.

"It would be a signal to every Roman officer in these hills. No, no, Colchus deserves no revenge, for if ever a man was his own Nemesis it was he."

The Carthaginian started to leave the barn, but in the door he turned for a last look at the sword. Its gray blade stood out a span from the Greek's body, and it seemed to throb with life in the twilit gloom as the dead man twisted and swayed. A mighty itch to possess it, to feel the cool strength of its hilt in his palm, assailed him.

"Why should I fear it?" he whispered to himself. "I am not a fool like Colchus. Surely, it will be only a source of safety to a soldier who exercises due prudence. Moreover, Hanno said that it should lead us—some of us—out of Italy. We swore that he who carried it should be chief—and I alone am left of the three who took the oath! By Tanit, this is fate! Sword, you are mine."

He retraced his steps, gripped the edge of the Greek's corselet in his left hand and with this leverage drew the dripping blade from the corpse's chest. Free of the dead man, it swung feather-light in his grasp, keen, trenchant, dully threatening.

Hamilcar wiped it on a fold of Colchus's kilt, then slashed through the rope that had hung the Greek.

"Bury him in the yard," he ordered the Numidians as what had been Colchus sagged to the floor. "Not deep, for we have far to ride tonight. There is death in these hills."

THE wind that swept the pass was edged with the freezing breath of the glaciers that scarred the Alpine peaks. The Iberians shivered as they took their stance, and mechanically slung their missiles at the figures of the Romans bobbing among the boulders a bowshot distant. Hamilcar shivered, too, for all the plundered cloak of fur which wrapped his shoulders; and he felt the quivers which wrenched the bony frame of his horse whenever the icy blast yelled off the mountains and funneled through the depression of the pass.

A short cast above the line his men had strung from cliff to cliff, Baraka's Big One teetered monotonously in the lee of a rock, more clumsy than ever in full war panoply and the huge bullshide boots which Baraka had fashioned to protect the elephant's corns from the sharp rocks and icy stretches of the mountains that shut off Italy from Gaul.

Around an elbow of the pass hoofs rattled, and Mago galloped into view, his black features gray with the cold.

"Brrrrr, what a land!" he chattered, reining in beside the Carthaginian. "If we might only have found a ship!"

"What use to weep for the unattainable?" answered Hamilcar. "If we had made for the coast the legions would have gathered us in long ago. How do you progress up ahead?"

"Ill. There is a walled village in a bowl beneath the crest of the pass. I must have the Big One to crack it open for us."

Hamilcar frowned at the Romans edging steadily forward upon the tenuous line of Iberians.

"These border legions are stout fellows," he said. "I can not hold them unaided."

"True, O Hamilcar," assented the Numidian; "but if we do not carry this village we are hemmed between it and these Romans—and my people report it is stuffed with light troops."

"You are right," agreed Hamilcar. "Take Baraka. I will retire slowly as far as that elbow in front of us. There I will leave a dozen to keep the legionaries in check, and with the rest hasten after you. We take the village or we perish. And it will be hard if after all the perils we have survived some of us do not escape."

"There are not so many of us even to perish," replied Mago grimly, eying the wide intervals in the ranks of the slingers. "Well, may the gods have their will of us!"

And he rode away to accost Baraka, and lead the Big One up the rough slope of the pass, while Hamilcar turned his attention to the withdrawal of the Iberians as unostentatiously as possible. But the pursuing Romans were wily antagonists; they understood the gradual acceleration of the retreat, and pushed forward the more boldly. Instead of a dozen, Hamilcar must leave a score of slingers at the elbow bend, and the remainder of his scanty force must mount their staggering horses and racket up the pass after the Numidians to lend their strength to the storming of the village.

Two stadia beyond the elbow the pass widened into a valley, and in the midst of this the village was situated, a huddle of stone huts, the roof-timbers anchored with boulders against the fury of the mountain gales. The crude stone wall surrounding it would have crumbled at a blow from a catapult, but was a formidable obstacle to a handful of troops without siege equipment. Mago was an experienced campaigner, however, and he had grappled with the situation before his chief arrived.

The Big One, rumbling and grumbling, was backed off a couple of bow-shots from the village gate; Baraka touched him with the ankus, shrilled in his grotesque ear; and the immense beast lowered his armored head and lumbered into a run which was amazingly fast. The Roman auxiliaries on the walls showered the elephant with darts, but his armor protected him from all save surface scratches, and these only stimulated his rage. Squealing viciously, he thundered into the gate, burst its leaves asunder and pranced along the village street, trunk brandished against all who stood in his way. After him poured the Numidians, with the survivors of the column's infantry, and Hamilcar and the Iberians bringing up the rear.

The garrison took to the houses, defending themselves desperately, but whenever Mago or Hamilcar had difficulty in forcing an entrance they called the Big One from his parading and bade him shove in a wall, usually with the result that the inmates were buried beneath a heap of the loosely mortared stones and the heavy roof. The auxiliaries lacked the dare-all spirit of legionaries, and soon crumbled into flight, until the hollow of the valley was covered with men struggling in groups and individually.

One company of the auxiliaries made for the upper mouth of the pass, a precipitous gut in the cliffs, and Baraka sent the Big One careering after them. The elephant by now was in a fiendish temper. He had been on short rations for several days; he disliked the cold of high altitudes; he objected violently to the boots which Baraka had put on his feet; and he had slain enough men to have a craving for bloodshed. So he kept after the fugitives relentlessly, trampling on them or throwing them against the rocks whenever he overtook them.

As he neared the entrance of the pass Baraka perceived the difficulty of managing the great beast in its constricted space, and endeavored to turn him from his prey. But the Big One refused to be amenable. Despite the goading of the ankus and his master's shrill adjurations, he lumbered on into the gut. An arrow found a crack in the scales which protected his trunk, and the pain of the wound drove him frantic. His squeals resounded between the beetling cliffs. He caught a man in his trunk and beat him to a pulp against a boulder, then lurched on, eyes flaming, entirely heedless of the narrowing path, intent on destroying the enemies in front of him. One after another, he trampled them; but two men reached a section of the pass where the walls were so close that they could scarcely squeeze through shoulder to shoulder as they ran.

"Stop, my Big One," bleated Baraka. "Here is no path for you. Turn back, Great Baby of my heart! Turn before—"

But the elephant plunged into the straitened gut at a gallop. His tough hide chafed against the rock walls, tearing down a succession of loosened boulders and icicles that redoubled his rage. Heaving and straining, he wedged himself farther in the narrow way, and when Baraka prodded him with the ankus, begging him to back, he trumpeted savagely, tossed up his trunk and caught the Captain of the Elephants in its supple grasp. A moment he dangled his master before his little red eyes as if gloating over the murder of one he held responsible for his plight. Then he hurled the unfortunate man after the two auxiliaries who had eluded him, and Baraka became a red splotch against the cliffs.

Hamilcar and Mago, called into the pass by the first of the Numidians to respond to the Big One's frenzied trumpeting, realized the danger to the whole column if the way continued blocked.

"We must slay him," decreed the Carthaginian.

"Easy to say," retorted Mago, cautiously investigating the elephant's restless hind feet. "But his vitals are at the other end."

"Hew him apart, if necessary," replied Hamilcar impatiently. "I care not how many men we lose. He stands between us and Gaul, no less than did your village."

FIVE men died or were mauled before the spears of Numidians and the swords of Carthaginians, Iberians and Gauls finally severed the spine of the Big One's mighty bulk, and it was possible, as Hamilcar had said, to hew him apart and so make room for the column to pass. But even when this had been done there was trouble with the horses, which shied at the bloody rocks and chunks of monstrous flesh and limbs. The pursuing legionary infantry were at the mouth of the defile by the time the column was moving again, and in its winding precipitous depths there was scant opportunity for the accurate, long range slinging of the Iberians, which had been the most effective resistance the column could offer against superior numbers. The rearguard of the Carthaginian troops and the van of the pursuers were crossing swords as the last of the Numidians passed the scattered remnants of the Big One.

Mago came to Hamilcar with a worried look on his face.

"I would try to ride the Romans down if the footing were better and our horses were not so worn," he said. "But my men feel the cold too much to be on their mettle."

"This is work for the Iberians and Gauls," replied Hamilcar. "Rest easy. I will see to it."

The Numidian tarried, his pride hurt because the situation was beyond him.

"If it were a field for horse—" he began, and Hamilcar clapped him on the shoulder.

"This is a field for infantry. You have done your part. Now we shall do ours. Push on over the crest, and we will overtake you as soon as we have given the Romans a bellyful."

"But you?" protested Mago. "You are chief, Hamilcar. You must not risk yourself. We—"

"Each to his destiny," retorted Hamilcar. "Cheer up, man. In this defile the Romans can never overtake us. We will hold them until nightfall, then slip away and rejoin you. Tomorrow we shall be looking down on the plains of Gaul."

"May Tanit guide it so!" exclaimed the Numidian.

Hamilcar laughed, balancing the gray sword in his hand.

"*This* guides us!" he answered. "From end to end of Italy it has carried us. Will it fail us now? I think not!"

But Mago called back over his shoulder:

"I trust in you, not the sword! It is an evil friend, that sword, too thirsty, too changeable. All it seeks is the slaughter."

"So that it slays our enemies, why should we care?" replied Hamilcar. "It is like a woman, a lustful maid, ever hungry, never content. Feed its wants, and it will be faithful to you."

But as he picked his way among the weary Gauls and Iberians of the rearguard he found himself thinking otherwise.

"So Colchus talked—yes, and Norgon said much the same. But neither of them did it serve so long as me. Phaugh, I am an old woman from the cold and hunger and toil of the fighting! A sword is a stout friend to the man who wields it with skill, no more. When my arm falters, my head will fall. Yet no steel has touched me since I drew it from the Greek's breast—and today I require its help more than ever."

He circled it around his head, and the keen purr of the blade seemed to become a hiss, strident, menacing.

"That is not a happy song you sing, sword," he muttered. "It bodes ill—for some one. Ho, men, let me through! Way for Hamilcar! Gray Maiden will make good the rear."

They stood aside readily enough, courage spurred afresh by the presence of the commander they believed invincible and the sword whose fabulous powers were debated at every camp-fire. Hamilcar took his place in the rear rank of four men, stepping over the body of a dead Carthaginian infantryman who had been impaled by a Roman pilum. On his right hand an Iberian and a Gaul fought with long, straight swords similar to his own; on his left a Carthaginian cut and thrust with a shorter broadsword not unlike the weapons of the Roman legionaries, who crowded into the pass behind their convex shields. The Romans' pikes were gone; the fighting was hand-to-hand, sword-to-sword, the individual skill and strength of the Carthaginian mercenaries against the disciplined effort of the legionaries.

And if the numbers were unequal, Hamilcar, himself, seemed equal to a century. He was not content to meet the Roman advance. At times, when the pressure of the cohort jamming the mouth of the pass became so severe as to threaten to burst the fragile opposing line like a stream in freshet, he would spring forward alone, the gray sword darting and leaping, swooping and hovering, agleam with dreadful life and hunger, slashing gaps in the Roman ranks that slowed the steady tread of the legionaries and gave his men time to regain their wind.

Step by step he contested the pass while the sun sank lower and the bitter cold made the fighters shiver in their sweat. The Romans reached the narrowest section, where the Big One had stuck, just short of twilight, and here for some reason they seemed inclined to rest, nor was Hamilcar loath to seize the chance to ease his aching sword arm. Beyond this point the pass widened again, so that a dozen men might tramp it abreast, and he knew that on such ground the Romans, with their undrained reserves, would plow ahead almost regardless of the resistance his battered fighters might attempt. So he was prepared for the fiercest struggle of the day when the ordered *tramp-tramp-tramp-clank-clank-clank* of the legionaries echoed up the defile.

"To the last, men," he said briefly to his cluster of exhausted mercenaries. "There will be horses for you above—and tomorrow, remember, the plains of Gaul!"

A tired cheer answered him, and they dressed shields as the Romans loomed in the twilight, a brazen double file.

Hamilcar made the gray sword hiss in air, and strode out in front of the Carthaginians.

"Two at a time!" he exclaimed. "This is a simple task, Gray Maiden. What are two Romans to you, who have slain them by cohorts?"

One of the two he cut in the neck below the helmet-strap; the other sank, pierced through the groin. He stepped forward to receive the next pair, sword raised to strike. But something swished overhead. He looked up, startled, as a net dropped around his shoulders. A roar burst from his lips, and he drove the sword into the armpit of a Roman in the second rank; but when he strove to lift his arm the heavy cloth-strips of the net entangled the blade, one of his own men stumbled against him in the confusion and he plunged to his knees. The next moment he was down on the rocks, and the Romans rolled over him. The hobnailed sandals stamped into his flesh, the press of bodies suffocated him. He could feel the life ebbing from him under the cruel battering of human mallets, but he had no sense of resentment, only an amused wonder.

"No steel could touch me! Ho, Norgon, I—"

THE Tribune Paulus Sulpicius looked up from his seat by the camp-fire, and dropped the stylus with which he was scratching his brief report, as the centurion entered the circle of the fire light.

"What success, Valentius?" he asked.

The centurion's armor clashed in the splendid movements of the salute.

"The Numidians escaped. They had too long a start for us. But most of the others we slew."

"That is well," said the tribune approvingly. "Your name goes with this to the consul, my Valentius. I am pleased with you. Ha, you have a new sword!"

He pointed to the long, gray blade that shone naked in the centurion's hand. Valentius extended it for inspection.

"I took it from the body of the officer who withstood us so long in the pass, him we overcame with the net you bade us knot out of the strips of our cloaks. It is a fine piece of steel."

"A soldier's weapon," agreed the tribune, handling it lovingly. "You have earned it, and if I have my way you shall swing it next at the head of your cohort. He was a gallant enemy, that Carthaginian. His sword should be a lucky one. May it carve you a path to command of a legion!"

The centurion received back the sword.

"We took some prisoners," he answered. "For information. They say that is a magic sword. Who carries it can not be slain by steel."

"Such superstition is Punic, my Valentius," returned the tribune indulgently. "Bethink you, he who carried it last is dead, and how he came by his death matters little. Man lives while the gods indulge him. When they will he dies."

Looking About

IF YOU think things over it's rather difficult to be conceited. The other day on the way to the office I was walking along feeling fairly content with myself and my little corner of the world. New York deposits its daily garbage on its front pavements and every morning the D. S. C. collect it in wagons. I arrived on one collecting scene just in time to block the progress of can to wagon. I gave it the right of way but not in time to prevent checking its progress a little. The man carrying it gave me a glare of irritation flavored with contempt. I got his point of view without effort. However satisfied with myself I might be, in the eyes of another person I was merely an obstruction to the garbage traffic.

THIS plan, for your convenience, is submitted to your judgment. There are two general magazine theories as to covers. One is to have the same cover every issue and profit by the "trademark" value of the repetition. The other is to trust to the title and perhaps some other constant feature for "trademark" value and to change the general appearance of the cover by using a different color or picture for each issue.

We, of course, use the latter method. But in our case, since our magazine appears twice a month instead of monthly, there's additional reason for hanging out some kind of flag to let our readers know at a glance that the last issue has been replaced on the news-stands by a new one. So we've worked out a plan that will not only change the whole cover color each issue but will sharply mark off all second-of-the-month issues from all first-of-the-month issues.

The first-of-the-month issues, appearing on the 8th, will have a different color month by month but the second-of-the-month issues, appearing on the 23rd, will always have the same color. And that color—stand by for a shock—is going to be black.

Among magazine makers there's been, so long as I can remember, an hereditary and violent prejudice against black covers. "Too funereal," say they, "too gloomy. Terrible!" But in all trades and professions there is a certain proportion of principles or traditions that were adopted mistakenly, or perhaps, sound at the time, have ceased to be so, and have been perpetuated by the very human habit of following rules blindly. Some years ago, for various technical reasons, black covers looked to me like something worth trying despite the professional claim against them. The ones to decide whether black covers were good or bad seemed to me not the professional magazine makers but the people who buy magazines.

But, under the old ownership of our company, I had to plug away for years before I could get 'em to try even our black cover as an experiment. When they did try it the people who buy magazines immediately proved the professional magazine theorists wrong as to black covers. They liked them. Every time we used a black cover they liked it. The sales showed that they did.

And when I say the sales showed it I mean they really did. There are more poppycock theories on the "pull" of individual covers than on any other point in the magazine game. If one issue sells better or worse than another a lot of professional wiseacres dash up with the snappy explanation that it's because of so-and-so in the cover of one of them. They don't know a blamed thing about it nine times out of ten. There are too many factors involved besides covers. I've sat in on analyses of covers versus circulation going back over hundreds of issues and all we ever got out of it was the perfectly apparent fact that in the whole mess there wasn't one single, solitary cover phase or feature that could show anything like a consistent record in the way of circulation results. The nearest approach was made by black covers—out of I don't remember how many there was only one that didn't show at least some jump of circulation—and that one showed a loss.

That warrants trying out black as the regular cover for our second issue each month. The final verdict will come from you, the readers. Black or not black, just as you say.

A. S. H.

A free-to-all Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Walter Farnham rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Merna, Nebraska.

It is with pleasure that I follow the pleasing custom of making the newcomer's obeisance to those who are already seated about the Camp-Fire. I was born in Wisconsin, near the site of old Fort Crawford and that of an old fur-trading post, on the banks of the Mississippi, in whose waters I learned to swim.

Later came Dakota—before the division of the State—and there I saw cow ponies, herds of cattle and bad men. They still shot folks in those days. I spent eight months firing a steam shovel and, as engineman and trainman, I helped build two railroads. I have been a school dad and now work for Uncle Sam. Writing fiction is a side line but far the most interesting.

It is suggested that I give you my adventures. Well—I have been shot at twice, and missed, by different men, being unarmed both times myself, and once a wild Italian tried to split me with his knife but he didn't follow through, which was lucky for me. Once I got under a Baldwin locomotive to "clean her pan" and the engineer forgot about me and backed up the length of the side track, with me sprinting underneath. One time I was unconscious for seven hours from a blow on the head and another time I was dazed for three days as a result of a train wreck in which I unwillingly took part.

I have been in a number of train wrecks which were exciting enough at the time but which seem insignificant now. In my boyhood I tried to swim a channel of the Mississippi River and almost drowned. I went down the third time but got myself out after all. Lots of kick to that. Outside of those things my life has been quite uneventful.—WALTER FARNHAM

And a word concerning the story itself:

In the early history of Nebraska something like this is said to have occurred. A notorious killer and

for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Fire

has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

horse-thief, Doc Middleton by name, saw a horse standing tied in front of his owner's shack and notified the man that he would come to take the horse before night. It is said that he did thus take the horse, without any resistance on the part of the owner.—Walter Farnham.

VERY willingly is space found for the following in "Camp-Fire." Every real sportsman will do what he can to stop this disgusting slaughter.

Charleston, South Carolina

I am asking you to please read the enclosed circular letter from my old friend G. W. Lillie, "Pawnee Bill," regarding the proposed slaughtering of the last remaining herd of wild free buffalo in the United States.

After you have read this letter I believe you will be heart and soul with Major Lillie and all other white men regarding this anticipated "feast of the vultures," and will be constrained to publish this letter (Lillie's).

It seems that a few "select" *sportsmen?* of great means have at last become aware of the existence of this herd of noble animals and have clubbed together to wipe them out for a short "thrill of a lifetime"—some such a *thrill*, I guess, and with about the same "kick," that the two young Chicago maniacs got out of beating the brains out of a helpless boy with a cold chisel in recent years. They made one grand mistake by asking this old-time buffalo hunter to join the slaughtering party. I have no doubt that you will use your influence to bring to a halt this wanton butchery of the "last of the Mohicans." P. S. The hunt is scheduled to take place *November 1, 1926.*—Raymond W. Thorp.

Pawnee Chamber of Commerce,
Pawnee, Oklahoma

Fom my earliest recollection I never saw a buffalo robe or a mounted buffalo head that I did not feel that it should not have been killed. Many millions were killed just for their hides and the delicious meat was left to the wolves and vultures. In the early '70's there were fully 50,000,000 buffalo roaming our western plains, then the commercial hunters came, killing them only for their hides, two dollars each. In a few short years the buffalo herds were annihilated. As early as '72 the ruthless slaughter which was then taking place aroused our western Congressmen to action. Delegate McCormack, of Arizona, and Senator Cole of California, introduced a bill in Congress to protect the buffalo, but lack of interest by the eastern members prevented it from passing. It was not until 1906, when I, through the good offices of Hon. B. S. McGuire, Congressman from Oklahoma, got a bill passed setting aside the Timber Preserve in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma, that any concerted sentiment and effort was put forth to protect and preserve the buffalo. Our success was due largely to the good offices of the press of all the large cities in the country, without which the buffalo would now be entirely extinct.

Now comes an invitation to me to attend what is called the LAST GREAT BUFFALO HUNT, at which 300 of as fine specimens of the American Buffalo as I have ever seen are to be slaughtered by rich men who call themselves sportsmen and have the money to pay. This is to take place on Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake of Utah this fall. How a modern and up-to-date city like Salt Lake City can sit idly by and allow such an outrage at her very doors is something I can not understand.

Will the multitude of American sportsmen, who match their skill against the cunning and wariness of wild game, permit the butchering of tame buffalo with bullets of gold?

I protest, and ask every red-blooded sportsman to take hold and save the few remaining buffalo. Years ago fifty million were slaughtered and wasted to our everlasting disgrace. We must not heap more shame on ourselves by killing, for pay, the few buffalo we have left.—G. W. Lillie (Pawnee Bill).

I hope none of these spoiled little boys gather at our Camp-Fire. They certainly do not sound like our kind of stuff. If they do happen to have slipped in among the rest of us, I trust they will realize how entirely unwelcome and out of place they are and that, well, for their own sakes, depart before the *men* who meet at Camp-Fire discover their identity and take steps. They ought to be expelled from every sportsman club to which any of them happens to belong and to be socially ostracized by every one who has even an elementary conception of what real sport is.

A WORD from Arthur D. Howden Smith concerning his story in this issue.

Babylon, Long Island.

In "Hanno's Sword" I've tried to tell by indirection the story of the budding of Roman power, a power that was so instinct with might that it was able to survive an almost unexampled series of military defeats; and at the same time I also attempt to represent something of the spirit of Hannibal's army, which was probably the most efficient mercenary organization in history.—A. D. H. S.

CASES like the following come to our magazine every little while. There are organizations that give their time to handling them, but in many instances they can not do what is needed nor do they, I think, cover all the geographical ground.

First, a letter from George E. Holt of our writers' brigade and "A. A.", through whom the case comes to us.

Encinitas, California.

I've answered this letter in the negative necessarily. But I've told the writer that some other countries, such as Australia or New Zealand, might offer what he wants, and that I'd send you his letter to be referred to whoever you think might help, or to print if you think the best results could be accomplished in that way.—George E. Holt.

The letter from the young man himself, his name of course omitted:

I would like to ask you a few questions about Morocco. Mainly the history and customs, also if you care to answer, the chances of employment.

I am a young man of eighteen; am on my second prison term, having ten months to do yet. I would like the chance to make good which would in this country be very near impossible for a person with my record to do. I want a chance where employers don't look so much at what a man's past was.

I believe there are still people who are willing to help a person instead of always hounding one on account of his past.

I am still young and have my whole life before me and would like to make something of it, for God knows there is nothing in this kind of a life. I think Morocco is just waking up to its possibilities and a man would have a fair chance to make something of himself.

I have no trade but I am studying import and export, also accountancy. Any help you give me will be highly appreciated.—Y. P.

We'd not be here at our Camp-Fire if we didn't have at least a bit of the outdoor feeling of comradeship and the helping hand. What's to be done in this case and in others like it? This boy sounds sincere. He isn't asking for anything except a chance to make good by his own efforts. Apparently, having tried out the wrong path, he's found for himself that it doesn't pay and wants to get on the right path and stay there. The odds are against any one with his record and he knows it. All he asks is to find some place where the odds are reduced to something like the odds any man has to face.

There's no need to be sentimental or foolish about it. Many men in prison have the right stuff in them and many are better stuff than plenty of people outside. The fact remains that they have been found guilty of crime, in most cases justly, and, having slipped already, may have got the habit. We can't rush out and take to our bosoms every convict who figures he can get something out of us and may see in us only easy marks and easy picking.

The fact remains that some of these men deserve a helping hand. Not charity, but a chance to make good by their own efforts. Can we do anything for them? The problem is much too big for me, but among us maybe we can work out something. Y. P. looks like a good one to begin on. Who has any suggestions?

SOMETHING from Raymond S. Spears in connection with his novelette in this issue. As he says, some of Camp-Fire may argue with him as to his use of snares or over other fine points in his handling of fact-material in fiction, but friendly discussion is one of our chief reasons for meeting around the blaze. And we need not worry greatly over how Mr. Spears will face before the Camp-Fire tribunal. His being a nationally recognized authority on trapping and wild life wouldn't ensure his escape from a grilling if he slipped, but his use of fact-material has withstood Camp-Fire's scrutiny for years and, though he's just as human as the rest of us, a friendly difference of opinion is about the worst he's likely to harvest.

Inglewood, Calif.

I took for my locale a region somewhat similar to the Uintah country north of the DuChesne at Strawberry river, where a friend of mine caught fourteen lobos a few years back—a bad band of raiders on the Latter Day Saint (Mormon) stock. But for freer hand I united sundry features which I needed in a U-shaped region, with inside and outside excursions.

I felt obliged to bring in for verisimilitude and contrast the two fur trappers, *Pretty Shells* who follows the lines her husband blazed through a timber belt, and the thief-desperado trapper whose claim-jumping brings in the subject of Trappers' Code and points the differences between bounty-wolf and pelage wildcrafting. And also emphasize the conflicting plot interests of the desert-timber-human-nature conditions.

Of course, I've made accuracy my background concern. Some of the boys are likely to paw the air a bit at my use of snares. But I'll go to the mat on that—even if I have to claim authority! I've kept wolf character and intelligence well within bounds.

THE real territory generally resembles the Gilbert Peak quadrangle, U. S. Topographical Survey, and the Singing Birds are somewhat similar to the Uintah Mountains, south of Wyoming-Utah boundary line, and a friend of mine with his partner caught fourteen bad wolves south of the Uintahs about 1921-22, the partner being an old wolver, and killed four a few days before I came through the DuChesne country. But for simplicity of locale which I required, I could have used the real names, as Uintah, Lake Atwood, the East Fork country for Wolf Dens, etc. As I modified certain aspects I renamed and simplified conditions. But had the government map in mind as I wrote.

I understated throughout the story, finding greater verisimilitude in constant restraint. I bore in mind the professional wolvers who will test every detail as they read, using the crucible of their own experience and observation. I don't take any chances with those boys. They'll glare at the snaring episode and I think they'll look sideways at my emphasis on certain phases of wolf-personality—the sharp division between the outlaw band and the no'counts of the Wolf Dens. But that is one of the points I felt obliged to make. And green timber, Minnesota and Canada wolvers will perhaps question the immensity of the desert background. But if they can show me, I sure want to know my sins.—SPEARS.

THIS is by no means the first time the Indian sign language has come up for discussion, but this comrade seems to have unusually valuable information concerning it. More than that, like a good Camp-Fire comrade, he is willing to pass it along. And it should be passed along.

San Diego, California.

When a very small boy I always wanted to live with Indians, and was generally criticized for the thought. When twelve years old I was sent to live in Dakota Territory with a relative and I got my Indian wish because we were located on the edge of the Sioux Reservation. I was on a cattle ranch and all my efforts were devoted to learning to rope, to ride and to talk Sioux.

I soon found that the gesture or sign language was of more importance than any one Indian tongue, there being 76 different Indian vocal languages and but one Universal Sign Language. The Indians would readily teach you their spoken language but seemed combined against teaching the sign language and it took me ten years (10 years) to get it. That was thirty years ago, as I left the cow range after ten years in the saddle. Since then I have never lost interest and have continued the study and research of sign language, in fact, have checked it up with twenty-odd tribes of Plains Indians. There are 761 words in the language, 390 of which are basic or single sign words and 371 are compound, double and triple sign words.

Doubtless many of the old timers and many of the younger fellows may be interested in the sign language, and I will be only too glad to help any such before I pass along. If anybody interested will write me I will be glad to answer any questions or give him any information desired about this true American language, the Sign Language of our Plains Indians. Write me.—WM. TOMKINS.

A WORD from one of the West's old-timers on two-gun men and that old mistake of the artless fiction writer who has a character hit another gentleman over the head with the end of the gun he shouldn't do it with:

> Hicks, Texas.
>
> I am somewhat familiar with the South West frontier—New Mexico and Arizona of 46 years ago. I was in the Ranger service of Texas for three years from 1880 to 1883. Then worked for the sheriff of Grant County, N. M., for two years. I never heard of a man hitting any one with the butt of his six-shooter. They always lammol them over the head with the barrel. Nor did the West of my day use anything but a single action Colts .45. I never saw but one two-gun man, and he was a joke. He was a little red-headed, freckled-faced runt fresh from the Buckeye State who joined when I did. I can see him now with his broad-brimmed hat and rawhide breeches, two six-shooters and horse that pitched. The last time I saw him was in Walcott & Mills' Saloon, playing a piano in Silver City, New Mexico.—S. N. Wilson.

AND this, anti-weaponists, from a policeman! Colonel George Warburton Lewis of our writers' brigade is Chief of Insular Police for Porto Rico and has behind him quite a few years of similar experience in various other places. The San Juan *Times* prints on its editorial page a paper read by him at the Crime Conference in San Juan in November. I quote the final paragraph:

> "Though I am a policeman of some experience, I am far from convinced that police clubs are the most effective weapons with which to fight crime-waves. Crime-waves, when all is said and done, must be met with waves of education, waves of health, of Christian reform, of constructive efficiency, of reasonable tolerance between groups and individuals alike and of the simple elements that make for evenly distributed prosperity and community contentment."

I get some personal gratification from the above. Some fifteen years ago I began preaching the theory that you can no more make a good government or a good nation out of bad citizens than you can build a sound house out of rotten bricks, that however much we may theorize and practise as to forms of government no form of government will be good unless the citizens who make, operate and are the government and the nation are good citizens and that the only practical means of getting better citizens is systematic, organized education in civic morality. Because I advocated such a thing I was considered well-meaning but a fool. Still worse, I was called an idealist, which is the lowest term of abuse and villification known to the materialists who so largely shape American opinion.

But at the end of these fifteen years? Things seem to have changed. Colonel Lewis's statement is merely one example of many. One after another, thinking men, in the face of the increasing gravity of our social and political conditions, have begun advocating some phase or another of education in civic morality. Observe carefully and see how many of them have started thinking and working along this general line.

The movement will grow slowly, but the big step has been taken—the first step. People have begun thinking seriously along these lines—have even begun to act, for here and there an organization shows its head. Within a few years more there may well be a definite general movement in this direction. In any case, it is coming.

That fool dream of a fool idealist fifteen years ago.

And to many of the materialists enlisted under the banner of the Golden Calf to which they give the resonant name of Economic Determinism it will seem remarkable that any idealistic dream should have turned into something practical and real. As if everything yet devised of man did not have its beginnings in an idea, in a "dream," in an idealism!

Why, I may yet live long enough to see the national motto given to America by the materialists, "The Dollar Über Alles," challenged in the open field by a small but determined army who believe that the acquisition of property may not be the highest aim for man and that his value to the world is not necessarily measured with exactness by the size of his bank account.

If I'm granted an unusually long span of years I may even live to see Christianity really working for the practical and general application of the one principle that is the heart of its faith, the Golden Rule, instead of expending its efforts on arguments over creeds, working itself into a profuse perspiration in an attempt to go Christ one better by abolishing drink, and wandering still farther from its essential path by having so many of its followers giving their time to correcting other people's bad habits instead of trying to get real Christianity into their own hearts.

Perhaps that is too much to expect. At least I can be happy in the knowledge that Americans are really awakening to the practical need of building good citizenship as the one solid hope for good government and a good nation.—A. S. H.

AT OUR last meeting we inaugurated the new custom of having the biography of one of our writers at the end of each "Camp-Fire," so that all readers may come to know personally our old writers as well as those who join us as we go along. This time it's Barry Scobee.

MR. SCOBEE is an old-timer on *Adventure*. He is also a down-trodden, luckless man; we have his word for it. He says nothing ever happens to him. When he first wrote for us, back in 1919, he was particularly plaintive about his luck. Here's what he said then:

"Here's my luck. I was an attendant in a Keely Cure institute once. No, I wasn't working my way through. Staying in a room one night to watch a dopey, I was awakened from profound sleep by him standing over me brandishing a razor and a revolver and calling me the man who had run away with his wife. But nothing happened. He forgot me and went to shout out of the window at some woman he insanely took for his wife. I and another man drove an old tin car through the guard into a besieged town once, that being the only available way of getting in. We were taken before the general, who threatened to shoot us. But nothing happened. In an hour we were sipping cognac with the American Consul. I was taking a man to military prison once in the Philippines, on a small steamer, and lost my gun. But nothing happened. The prisoner found it and returned it to me. I have been deer hunting and bob-cat hunting in exceedingly wild country. But nothing happened. The other men got the game. I helped to go to the source of the greatest lost gold-mine story that ever tempted the Southwest. Nothing happened. There wasn't any mine.

"Now all that isn't any laughable matter, believe me. It means that when I concoct a piece of fiction I've got to slave like a printer's devil to work up a climax!"

Mr. Scobee gets locale, settings and fact material for his stories from his own experience. He has "lived around" in the Southwest most of his life, in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, and six years in the Puget Sound region of Washington gave him material for his Northwestern stories. He soldiered in Texas and the Philippines in the regular army, Company H, 9th U. S. Infantry, from November 22, 1907, to November 21, 1910.

So much for the authenticity of his story material. It might be added that some of the stories which he has built around the material and which have appeared in these pages have been mentioned elsewhere. His story, "The Wind," included in O'Brien's Best Short Stories for 1921, first appeared in *Adventure.*

AS TO the rest of his dull and uneventful life, here's Mr. Scobee's sad story:

He was born May 2, 1885, on his father's farm near Pollock, Mo., in the northern part of the State. He was educated at the local school, and attended the normal school at Kirksville, Mo., but left before he obtained his degree. Sometime during his early years he learned the printer's trade at Unionville, Mo.

After school he went to the army for a commission but changed his mind when he got in, though he says he had "no particular kick" against the service. He was post printer in the army, at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, for a year or two, and after his army service ended in November, 1910, spent a year knocking about Missouri.

He took a newspaper job on a daily paper at Pittsburg, Kansas, October 3, 1911, and continued there about three years, with the exception of three months when he worked on a paper at Muskogee, Okla.

He spent winter of 1914 at Corpus Christi, Texas, and lived in San Antonio from January 28, 1915, to February 28, 1917. He has been on the Mexican border, and across in Mexico a little, as a newspaper man on the San Antonio *Express*, and working for other papers; and was military writer on the *Express* for some time, being on General Funston's headquarters when Pershing was in Mexico. He lived in Fort Davis, Texas, March 1, 1917, to August 31, 1918, and in Bellingham, Wash., from June 7, 1919, to September 10, 1925, when he returned to Fort Davis, Texas, from which place he writes us now.

The winter of 1918-19 he spent at and near San Antonio.

He was married at Kansas City, November 24, 1911.

He ran both a country newspaper and a hotel here at Fort Davis in 1917-18, but afterward gave them up.

"RECREATIONS," says Mr. Scobee, "are hiking up a high mountain now and then, and down again.

"Or riding in cattle round-ups with reg'lar cowboys, watching how they do, or branding and burning my fingers.

"Studying Indians from their numerous old paintings on the rocks of the Southwest, or their shelters, etc. (Quite amateurish at this.)

"Studying birds and classifying them, and acquiring knowledge of their habits. (Quite an amateur ornithologist, quite amateurish that is.)

"Studying the Mexicans, who are my nearest neighbors, and studying their language and acquiring one new word annually if I'm industrious. Can say *manana* and "hot tamale" and "a bowl of chili" already, and *buenos dias*—or something about like that.

"Saw a bank cashier offer a cowboy a chair today. The cowboy kinda blushed and said: 'By gosh, that's the first time anybody ever brought me a chair in my life. Reckon I'll set down in it and try how it goes.' Nobody ever asked me for my memoirs before until *Adventure* done so, but unlike the cowboy I can't enjoy it.

"P.S.—How I happened to be in the bank where the cashier and cowboy got so polite and friendly, was, I went in to fill my fountain pen that I found, as the saying is."—

J. M. C.

Ask

QUESTIONS *and* ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Canal Zone Police

A BRANCH of government service that may be compared to our State police in its high standards and exacting requirements for recruits. And there is plenty of chance for promotion.

Request:—"Would you please answer the following questions pertaining to the Canal Zone Police?

(a) What is the enlistment period?
(b) What are the enlisted ranks?
(c) What are the requirements for enlistment?
(d) What are the commissioned ranks?
(e) What are the requirements for a commission?
(f) What are the organizational units?"—JAMES H. MCLEAN, Milwaukee, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—As to working for the Panama Canal in any of its branches, the main office has issued a warning relative thereto, viz:—

"Persons seeking employment with The Panama Canal or the Panama Railroad Company are cautioned not to go to the Isthmus without an appointment secured through the Washington Office of The Panama Canal or through an authorized recruiting agent. Appointments will usually be made from approved applications on file in the Washington office. Persons who go to the Isthmus without previous appointment, with the hope of obtaining employment with the Panama Canal or the Panama Railroad Company, do so on their own responsibility. The same examination, as regards physical and other qualifications, must be passed on the Isthmus before employment there as is required of those who are appointed through the Washington office. The appointments made on the Isthmus are principally in minor-grade positions, including unskilled labor, in which the rates of pay are as low as 20 cents per hour. An unauthorized journey to the Isthmus in expectation of obtaining work may result in hardships and cause unnecessary expense to the applicant.

The Panama Canal desires to discourage such journeys and will accept no responsibility for conditions that may arise therefrom."

Panama Canal Police:—

First Class: White men, between the ages of 21 and 40 years, and at least 5 feet 8 inches in height,

Adventure

BOOKS YOU CAN BELIEVE

Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

GOODS

and Commodities Tested by Our Experts

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

with a minimum weight of 140 pounds (measurements and weight, without clothing), must be of sound physique and of clear intellect, of good moral character and correct habits, and able to read and write the English language. A knowledge of Spanish is desirable. An excellent discharge from the United States Army, Navy, or Marine Corps, or a record of satisfactory experience in police work is required. Appointees must agree to serve one year with the police force on the Isthmus and furnish their own uniforms.

Probationary appointment.—Each employee appointed in the Police and Fire Division, The Panama Canal, shall be considered a probationer for a maximum period of six months; provided that on the recommendation of the Chief of Division, with the approval of the Executive Secretary, the full six months' probationary period may be waived. Probationary employees shall be examined monthly and failure to satisfactorily pass the prescribed examinations during probationary employment shall be considered sufficient cause for separation from the service prior to or at the expiration of the probationary period.

After permanant appointment administration promotions are made upon the completion of one year's efficient and satisfactory service.

Promotions to the rank of sergeant, lieutenant, and captain are made from the ranks.

Cables

A COMMENT from the expert who answered this query on the density of deep-sea water and its effect on sinking objects says that the point is one which is continually raised in inquiries to him.

Request:—"I am writing to find out if you will settle an argument which has arisen between a bunch of us.

This is the question: Does an ocean cable sink to the bottom or does it remain suspended in the water because of the water pressure?

I argue that it goes clear to the bottom regardless of the depth, but one of my opponents in the discussion claims to have worked for the Postal Telegraph Company for years and he claims they went out many times to fish up cables and never had to send their grappling hooks more than three hundred feet deep. To find the cable, I mean.

To my mind this sounds like bunk, but at present he has all the best of the argument because of his so-called 'experience.'

If you can answer this please do so and give us all the dope—reasons, etc. If he is right I am willing to admit it but will have to reverse all my preconceived ideas on the matter. If he is wrong then please help us out and we will be eternally grateful to you. If you can tell me any books that will answer this I will do my best to get them."—W. W. BEARLY, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Lieut. Greene:—The impression that objects sunk in deep water remain suspended above the bottom on account of water pressure is very common but is wrong. They invariably sink to the bottom.

The following should be remembered:

1. The force of gravity is in effect on the land, on the water, and under the water.

2. The pressure is equal in all directions at any given depth.

3. Water is practically incompressible, so its density at any depth is only a fraction more than at the surface.

Now, although the pressure at the ocean bottom is measured in tons per square inch, the pressure is equal in all directions at any given depth. Were this not so, the water itself would not be in equilibrium. If an object is immersed in water at any depth; it will rise if its weight is less than that of the water it displaces, for instance a cork; it will remain suspended if the weight is exactly the same as the water that it displaces; an example of this is a steel ship floating; it will sink if its weight exceeds that of the water that it displaces; our cable is an example of this.

If water were compressible, so that its density increased with the depth and pressure to any appreciable extent, then objects which sank at the surface would in all probability drop to a level where they were in balance with the density of surrounding liquid, and there remain in suspension. Water, however, is practically incompressible and its density at say two thousand fathoms (six feet to a fathom) is only a fractional percentage greater than at the surface. From this it follows that any object that is too dense to float at the surface, will continue to sink until it reaches the bottom, and this is borne out by the facts.

When grappling for cable in mid-ocean, it is usually necessary to pay out four or five nautical miles (6080 feet to a nautical mile) of rope, and the force needed to raise the cable amounts to several tons, due to its own weight. The time taken to raise a cable to the surface from a depth of two thousand fathoms after it is hooked on the grapnel is a matter of many hours even if weather conditions are favorable.

In laying cable over an uneven bottom great care is taken to pay out sufficient slack so that the cable will not be suspended between the submarine hills, as such a condition would result in the failure of the cable in a relatively short time on account of the weight of the portion so suspended.

As to the Postal Telegraph Company finding cables at a depth of three hundred feet, it must have been that this was in some river, harbor or other shallow place and that the bottom was at this depth.

I know of no book on this subject that is published now. Sir Charles Bright published a book some years ago which described the earlier transatlantic cable laying expeditions, but it is out of print now and there are very few copies in existence on this side of the Atlantic. It was entitled "Submarine Telegraphs." There is a chance of course that a copy might be secured at some second-hand book store.

Be sure to accompany your letter of inquiry with a stamped, addressed envelop. Our Question and Answer Service is free, but experts are not required to reply to letters in which no return postage has been inclosed.

Tropical Forests

BE SURE to make your questions specific. This inquirer got an interesting answer to his very general query, but in most cases it is next to impossible for our experts to reply to letters of this kind.

Request:—"Will you please tell me about the tropical forests and forest products? I would like to know about their economic possibilities. Will you please write me about them both, the well-known and the ones that have been little explored? Also about the distribution and the chances for exploration."—JEAN GAYLORD, Phœnix, N. C.

Reply, by Mr. Barbour:—It is impossible, in the scope of a letter, to tell you much about the forests of tropical America, let alone the tropical regions of the whole world.

There are hundreds and hundreds of species, many of which have never been identified. In the Republic of Haiti, in the West Indies, with an area of 10,000 square miles, there are over one hundred species of trees, ranging from ones as well known as mahogany and lignum-vitæ down to ones which are so rare that they are scarcely known even in Haiti.

The forests of the tropics are never composed of just one species (like a pine forest in your own state, for instance), but of a mixture of very many kinds, only one or two of which may be of any commercial importance. Usually the growth is very dense, with lots of underbrush, twining vines, low bushes, etc., which make the forests hard to penetrate.

Important species may be divided into several classes: trees whose wood has special uses, such as lignum-vitæ; trees whose woods yield dyes, such as logwood and fustic; trees which yield tanning material, such as quebracho, mangrove, divi-divi; trees yielding special products, such as rubber, balata, balsam, copal, chicle; trees valuable for cabinet work, such as mahogany, Spanish cedar, satinwood, rosewood, etc.; and trees with fairly soft and light wood suitable for general construction, such as sandbox, hog plum, marupá, frei jorge, etc.

If you are especially interested in tropical forests, I suggest that you read S. J. Record's book "The Timbers of Tropical America," issued by the Yale University Press of New Haven, Conn.

Our experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next section.)*—BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *British waters. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.*—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 3 *Statistics of American Shipping. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

Islands and Coasts Part 1 *Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (See next section.)*—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

Islands Part 2 *Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Islands Part 3 *Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.*—WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba.

★ **New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands** *Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sports. (Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*—TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★ **Australia and Tasmania** *Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*—PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Malaysia, Sumatra and Java *(Editor to be appointed.)*

★ **New Guinea** *Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

Philippine Islands *History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.*—BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz.

Hawaiian Islands and China *(Editor to be appointed.)*

Japan *(Editor to be appointed.)*

Asia Part 1 *Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 2 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East14th St., New York.

Asia Part 3 *Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters. Natives, languages, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

★ **Asia Part 4** *North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China.

Africa Part 1 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria. (Editor to be appointed.)*

★ **Africa Part 2** *Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sports.*—CHARLES BEADLE, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France.

Africa Part 3 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠ **Africa Part 4** *Portuguese East. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Egypt, Tunis, Algeria. (Editor to be appointed.)*

✠ **Africa Part 8** *Sudan. Climate, prospects, trading,*

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

traveling, customs, history.—W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Turkey *Travel, history, geography, politics, races languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.*—J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y.

Asia Minor (*Editor to be appointed.*)

Bulgaria, Roumania (*Editor to be appointed.*)

Albania *History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

Jugo-Slavia and Greece *History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.*—Lieut. William Tenna, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z.

Scandinavia *History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

Finland, Lapland and Russia *History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.*—Aleko E. Lilius, care *Adventure.*

Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland (*Editor to be appointed.*)

✠**Great Britain** *General information.*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.*—Edgar Young, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.*—Paul Vanorden Shaw, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

South America Part 3 *Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern and Lower California. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.*—C. R. Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche. Inhabitants, history and customs; archeology, topography, travel and explorations, business conditions, exploitation of lumber, hemp, chewing gum and oil.*—W. Russell Sheets, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

✠**Canada Part 1** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sports, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.*—S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel.*—Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks.*—A. D. L. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 4 *Hunters Island and English River District. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.*—T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 5 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta. Climate, prospects, hunting, fishing and yachting.*—C. Plowden, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

✠**Canada Part 6** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.*—Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 7** *Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power.*—Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 8 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Lumbering, hunting, fishing and trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading.*—Fred L. Bowden, 54 Mason Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

Canada Part 9 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic. General questions on this territory, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere. Also Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*—Patrick Lee, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Newfoundland *Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information.*—C. T. James, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Alaska *Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.*—Theodore S. Solomons, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Baffinland and Greenland *Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).*—Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.*—E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico. Agriculture, automobile, routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.*—H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo. Agriculture, stock-raising, mining, game, fur-hunting, fishing, camping, outdoor life in general.*—Frank Earnest, Sugar Loaf, Colo.

Western U. S Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.*—Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.*—R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri Valley.*—Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (See section 66.)*—Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Great Lakes. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.*—H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.*—Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers. (Editor to be appointed.)*

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville. (Editor to be appointed.)*

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Southern Appalachians. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.*—Hapsburg Liebe, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Maine. For all territory* west *of the Penobscot river. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.*—Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Eastern Maine. For all territory* east *of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.*—H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 8 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.*—Howard R. Voight, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 9 *Maryland. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.*—Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.*—Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1880. *Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)*

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock promotion.*—Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign *(Editor to be appointed.)*

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.*—Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Jr., care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.*—R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; questions of horses of the old and new West.*—Thomas H. Dameron, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Motor Boating George W. Sutton, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operators, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—Edmund B. Neal.

Motor Camping John D. Long, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins Howland Wood, The American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Track Jackson Scholz, 73 Farmington Ave., Long Meadow, Mass.

Skating Frank Schreiber, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories.*—Edgar S. Perkins, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Tennis *Results, style of play, history, etc. Questions as to rules will not be answered.*—Fred Hawthorne, Sports Dept., New York Herald Tribune, New York City.

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

HERE is to be *Adventure's* laboratory for testing and judging the value of all commodities used in outdoor activities of any kind. Our staff of "Ask Adventure" specialists are the judges, each passing on only those goods of which he has particular and expert knowledge. A commodity will be judged by several of the staff in cases where varying geographical conditions are important factors.

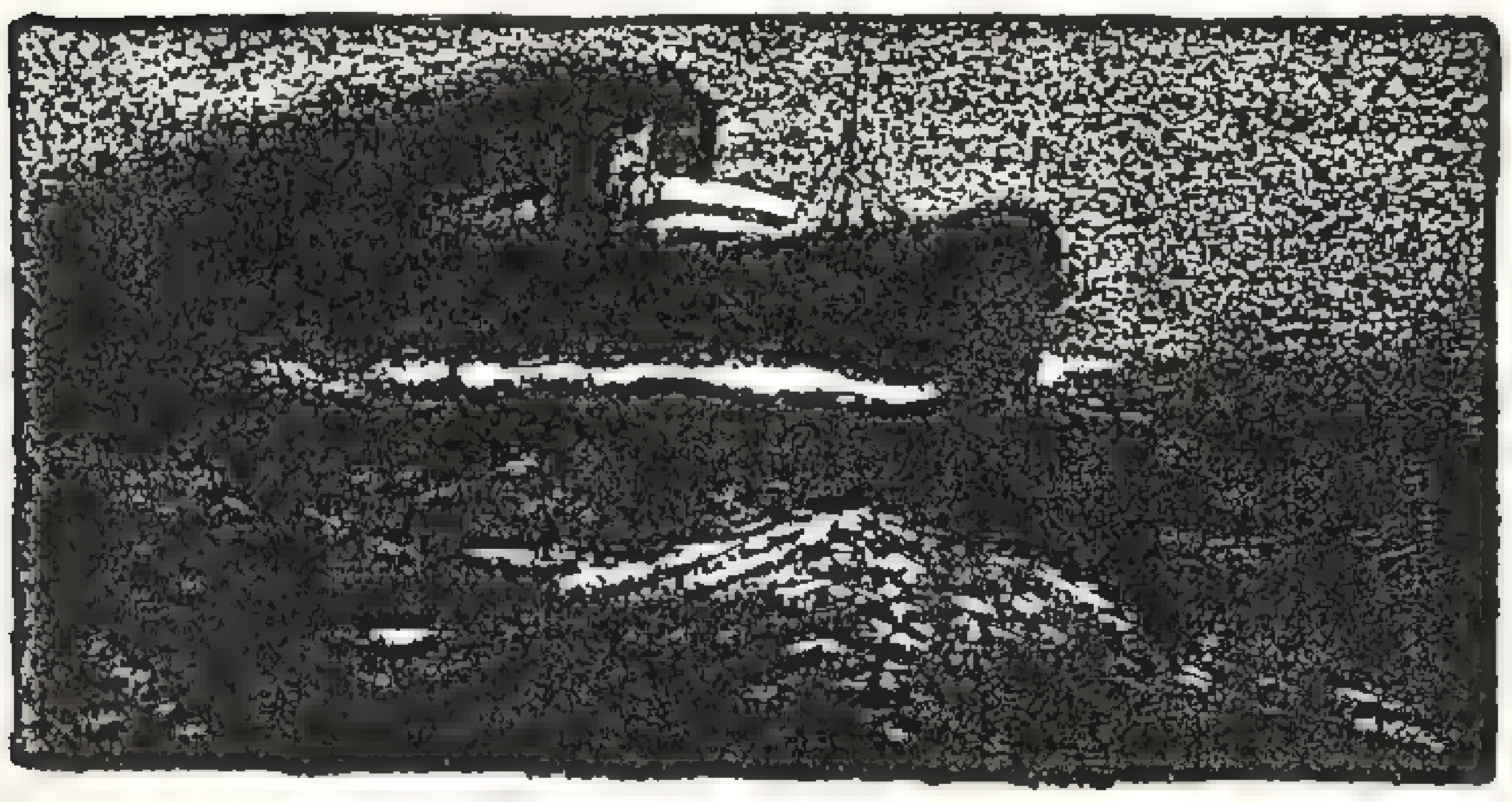
In this, as in all other branches of his work for our magazine, every "Ask Adventure" expert has definite assurance that the question of whether a commodity is or is not advertised in our pages is not to be considered by him in any way. Our service is primarily to readers, not to advertisers.

Goods will be sent by the makers or sellers through our office to the proper expert or otherwise made available, through us, for his testing. His report is made to us, not to the maker or seller. Commodities found to be first class in all respects will be entitled to *Adventure's* official seal of approval, usable on the package and in its advertising. Goods not found up to our standard of excellence will usually be indicated only by their omission from this department's lists and by their lack of our official seal.

Questions on any commodity should be addressed to "Straight Goods," not to any of our "Ask Adventure" staff. This service is, of course, free to any reader provided stamped and addressed return envelope is enclosed.

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World



IT IS the intention not only to build up a world-wide association of travelers but to establish, for their convenience, pleasure and practical help, a carefully planned organization that will unite in the common interests of travelers and travel all factors concerned therein and that will give the Association its own Stations, all over the globe, for their convenience and information en route. *Adventure* has maintained its own Stations for years and arrangements are now under way to add hundreds more to those in existence at this writing, in early September.

Even this bare outline sounds grandiose and perhaps, to some, too ambitious, so that until we have the foundations firmly built we'd rather not outline the plan in more detail. Membership in the *Adventure* Travel Association is going to be made extremely worth while, but until we have in hand the solid proofs of that statement we'll make no specific claims.

We do feel that an association of this type will help immensely in uniting both individuals and organizations for the benefit of all concerned and that in addition to practical services this union can do much to foster friendliness between travelers of one nation and residents of another and help to break down the walls of prejudice or even active hostility.

Our other Service Departments—"Books You Can Believe," "Straight Goods" and the "Questions and Answers" section of "Ask Adventure"—will of course cooperate fully with the A. T. A.

If you were planning a trip what would you want to know first? Where would you go for the information? When you arrived in a strange city how would you find an English-speaking friend who could tell you where to cash your checks and receive your mail, who could direct you to the most interesting spots in that vicinity and help you find congenial companions? Tell us the experiences you have had in your travels and what you want to know before you travel again—we are anxious to find out what services are most in demand, how we can best help our readers in this Association.

Adventure's policy has always been to take its readers into friendly confidence on future plans, to get their advice in shaping these plans and their active cooperation in turning the plans into definite accomplishments.

Verdicts by Adventure *as to the authoritativeness, reliability and authenticity of fact-material, local color and general soundness of current non-fiction*

BOOKS *you can* Believe

Given by Experts having first-hand Knowledge of the Material involved

IN THIS department we give our readers a service that is, we think, unique. There are thousands of book review columns, but, aside from those in technical publications, all are fundamentally alike. In "Books You Can Believe" judgment is not passed on literary quality. No books of fiction are reviewed. No one critic passes on all books—no, nor any dozen critics.

Our staff of reviewers numbers something like one hundred, each a specialist in a particular field, each known to us through his work as one of our "Ask Adventure" experts or through contributions to our magazine. Among them they cover the entire field of outdoor activities—exploration and travel of all kinds, the sea, foreign countries, hunting, fishing, games and sports, such sciences as anthropology and herpetology, everything in the outdoor and adventure field in its broadest sense.

Judgment is given solely on reliability. We answer for you the question "Is this book sound and authoritative in the fact material it presents—is it worth our reading or should we get our information from a more reliable source; can we trust it entirely or should its statements or point of view be discounted?" Its literary quality and even its surface interest are entirely secondary considerations. What our experts tell us is whether or not it is to be accepted as authority.

Books come to this office direct from the publishers and are sent by us to the experts in whose fields they fall. Books of little or no value will be reported as such to us but will be omitted from mention except in cases where a later popular vogue indicates the need of an authoritative verdict on their unreliability. Even the best of books will be covered in few words.

It is to be noted that most of our "Ask Adventure" experts have made out careful bibliographies on their respective fields, free to readers on request made direct to these experts, so that you can choose with assurance among old as well as new books. A stamped and addressed return envelope must accompany each request. Service is entirely free to all our readers.

Book reviews writted by our experts for this department are printed only in alternate issues of the magazine.

Old SONGS that Men have Sung

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if *all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage* (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

MANY requests have come in from time to time for "The *Flying Cloud*," an old narrative song of the days of piracy and of the slave trade. It is in the broadside style and in several ways similar to "The Mutiny of the *Saladin*" which has already been printed in this department. The name Anderson probably comes from some version of the *Saladin* story, for the more common name in this song is Hollander. I print the text, however, exactly as it was sent in.

The *Flying Cloud*

(Contributed by Captain A. K. St. Clair of Vancouver, British Columbia.)

Come all you jolly sailor lads
And listen unto me,
I am heavy bound in irons strong
To die for piracy.
With eighteen more I am condemned
In sorrow to complain,
For plundering and burning ships
Down on the Spanish Main.

My name is Edward Anderson,
As you will understand;
I was born in the County of Waterford
In Erin's happy land.
For I was raised most tenderly
Until I went to sea;
'Twas whisky and bad company
Made such a wreck of me.

My father bound me to a trade
In Waterford's fair town;
He bound me to a cooper there
By the name of William Brown.
I served my master faithfully
For eighteen months or more,
When I shipped on board the *Ocean Queen*
Bound for Valparaiso shore.

Now it happened in Valparaiso
I fell in with Captain Moore;
He commanded the clipper *Flying Cloud*
Sailing out of Baltimore.
He asked me if I would sign up
On a slaving voyage to go
To the burning shores of Africa
Where the sugar cane does grow.

Now we sailed away on the raging main
Until we came to the African shore.
Five hundred of those poor souls
From their native homes we tore.
We dragged them all across our decks
And stowed them down below,
While eighteen inches to a man
Was all we did allow.

Now in a few days we sailed away
With a cargo of black slaves;
It would have been better for those poor souls
Were they going to their graves.
For a plague and a fever came on board
Took half of them away—
We dragged their bodies up on deck
And threw them in the sea.

We sailed away o'er the raging main
When we came to the Cuban shore
We sold them to a planter there
To be slaves forever more—
For to toil in the rice and sugar fields,
Beneath the burning sun,
To drag away their wretched lives
Till their career was done.

Now when our money it was all gone
We went on board again,
When Captain Moore called us on deck
And said to us his men:
"There is gold and silver to be had
Down on the Spanish Main,
And if you'll agree, my jolly crew,
I'll tell you how it's gain(ed).

"We have the fastest sailing ship
That ever sailed the seas
Or ever spread a maintopsail
Before a lively breeze.
And if you'll agree, my bully crew,
And with me you'll remain
We'll send aloft our pirate flag
And scour the Spanish Main."

They all agreed but five young men
Who told us them to land.
Two of them were Boston boys,
Two more from Newfoundland,
The other was an Irish chap
Belonging to Trymore.
I wish to God I'd have joined that crew
And landed safe on shore!

The *Flying Cloud* was a clipper ship
Eight hundred tons or more;
She could easily sail around anything
Sailing out of Baltimore.

I have often seen that goodly ship
 With the wind abaft the beam
With her royals and her skysails set
 Taking fourteen from the reel.

We robbed and plundered many a ship
 Down on the Spanish Main,
Caused many a widow and orphan child
 In sorrow to complain.
And the crews we made them walk the plank
 That hung out on our sail,
For the saying of our captain was
 That dead men tell no tales.

Until a Spanish man-of-war,
 The Dungeon, hove in view;
She fired a shot across our bows
 As a signal to heave to.
To her we made no answer
 But ran before the wind,
When a chain-shot cut our mizzen-mast—
 We soon fell far behind.

We cleared our decks for action
 As she came up alongside,
And soon upon our quarter-deck
 There flowed a crimson tide.
We fought till Captain Moore was killed
 And thirty of our men,
When a bombshell set our ship on fire—
 We were forced to surrender then.

Oh, we were taken prisoners
 And into prison cast;
Was tried and was found guilty
 For to be hanged at last.
So you see what I have come to
 By my unlucky hand,
And now to die a scornful death
 By the laws of Spanish land.

Adieu unto my country
 And the girl I love so dear!
Her voice like music to my ear
 I never more shall hear;
I shall never kiss her ruby lips
 Or squeeze her lily-white hand,
For it's on the gallows I must die
 By the laws of Spanish land.

In the case of this song, as well as in the case of all the others that have appeared in the department, I want any information you can send me.

How old is it?
How well known?
Where is it sung?
When did the incident occur that is here described?
Do any of you know a different version?
Where has it been printed?

ADDRESS all letters—R. W. Gordon, Care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Lost Trails—This department for finding missing friends and relatives is printed only in alternate issues.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from 1919 to 1925, incomplete, totalling 112 issues, also November, 1918. What am I offered for the lot?—Address, B. DORAN, 3377 So. 17th Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

WILL SELL or EXCHANGE: Issues from 1920 to 1926, at 7c. each, plus postage. File incomplete, so will exchange.—Address, GEORGE J. CHAMPION, 1761 E. 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* complete for 1922. Thirty-six copies, 10c each plus postage.—Address, J. PECARO, 505 W. 6th Street, St. Charles, Illinois.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Camp-Fire Stations—Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to J. CASSIDY.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *November 23d*

The Buckaroo of Blue Wells

A Complete Novel

By W. C. Tuttle

A bookkeeper's stool in San Francisco held no attractions for *Jimmy Legg*—he wanted to be a cowboy. At Blue Wells he attempted to work out his heart's desire among rough men and blue-barreled six-guns. Things look darkest as *Hashknife Hartley* rides in.

Red Stripes

By Hugh Pendexter

There was no way to tell friend from foe in those desperate days. And when *Harry Knight* escaped from the Indians he met two strangers in the wilderness.

Jukes

By Bill Adams

Best of all the sailors was *Jukes*—strong of body, able in mind, master of the sea. Yet he could not go back to the home he had left so long ago.

The Phantom Major

By Larry Barretto

With the ambulance assigned to duty in the Vosges Mountains, where war was a gentlemen's truce, *Jim* and *Joe* yearn for action. Rumors of a German who dresses as a French major give them hope of getting plenty.

More Good Stories

Francesco *exchanges his ell-stick for a sword, in Part Three of* The Way of Sinners, by F. R. Buckley; Treasure, *Part Three, yellow men against white,* by Gordon Young; Aerial Blue, *a sporting girl and a broken plane,* by A. A. Caffrey; Baldy at the Brink, *the old horse finds the way,* by Alan Le May; A Steady Job, *a story of Central American Justice,* by Lawrence Rockwell; Texts, *the farm or the highway?* by L. Paul.

Adventure is out on the 8th and 23d of each month

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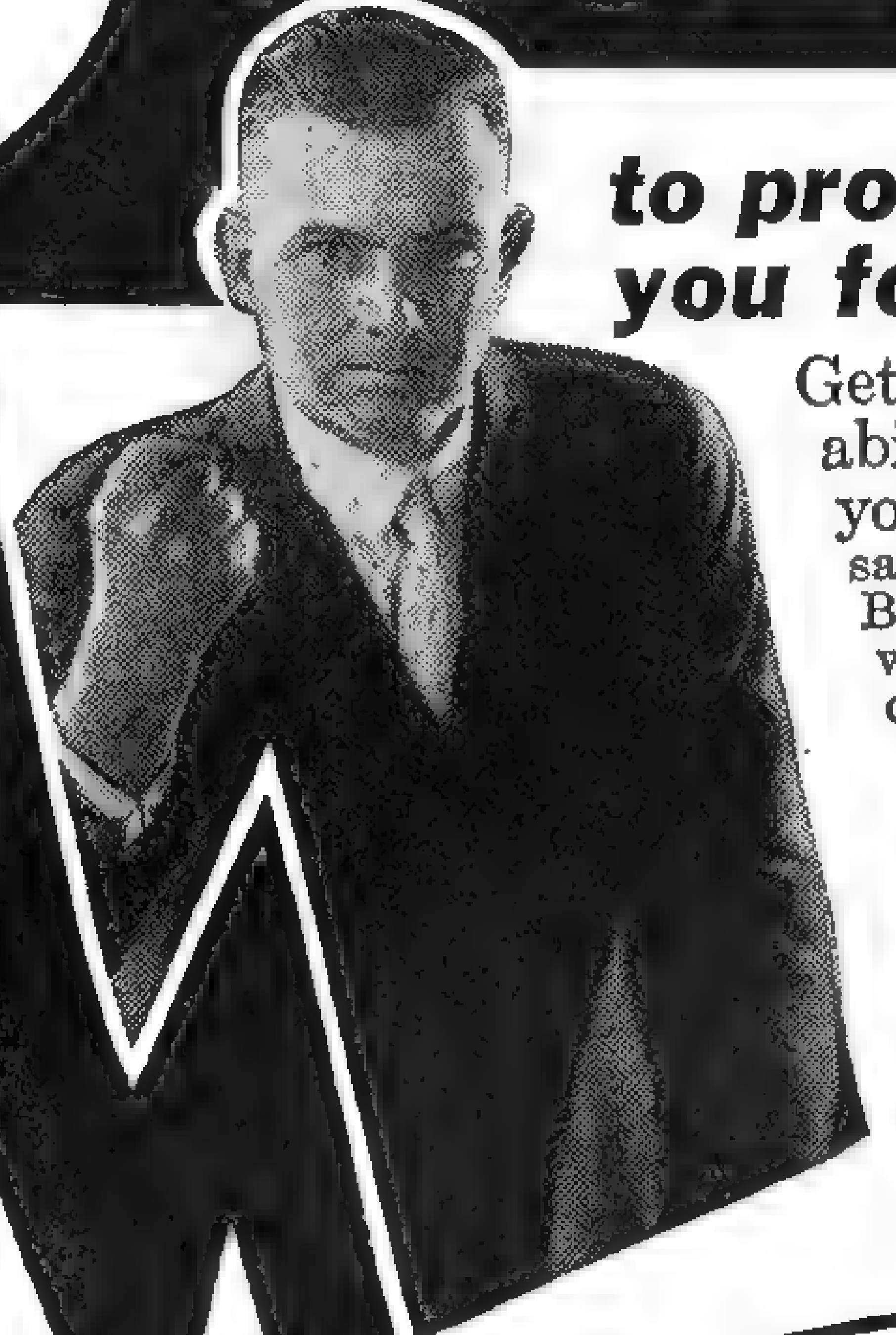

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7. **Western Electric Co.**
8. **Underwriters Lab., Inc.**
9. **Columbia University**
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12. **Lehigh University**
13. **University of Vermont**

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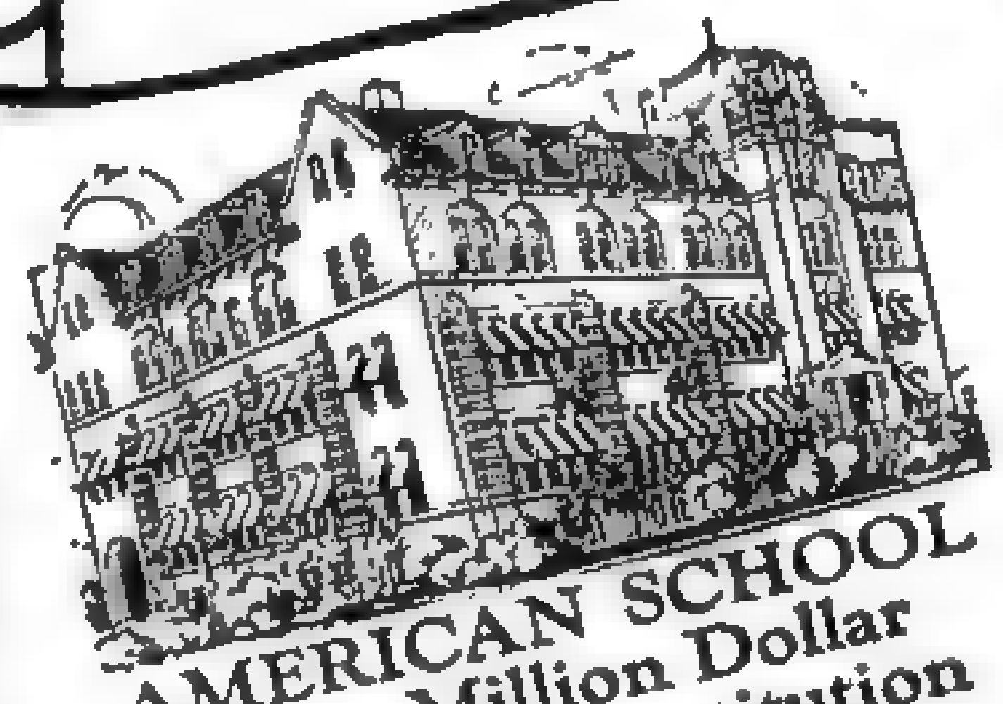

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By Chief Engineer Dunlap

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Read it. This million dollar institution stands back of this agreement to PREPARE you to fill a well-paid Electrical Job, and then to help you FIND the job—or to refund the small amount charged for your training!

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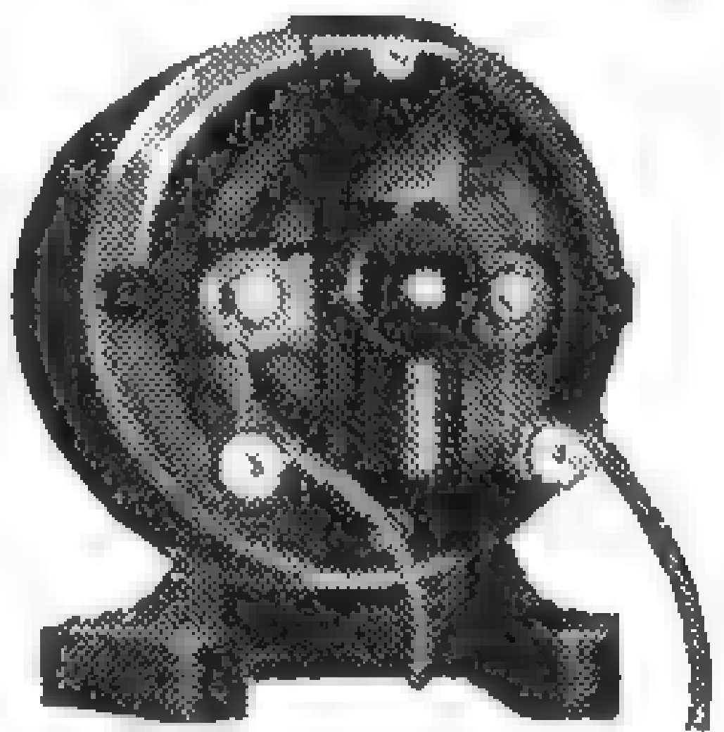

$10 Motor Given

I send you absolutely without extra cost, as a part of this training, 4 costly outfits of standard size tools and materials, so you learn Electricity BY DOING actual Electrical jobs. One of these outfits is a $10 Electric Motor—a real motor and generator, the same type as the big fellows in a power plant. I send it to you "knockdown" and have you wind the field and armature and assemble it. *That's the way I teach every branch of Electricity!* House-wiring, Electric Light, Radio, and Motor outfits included.

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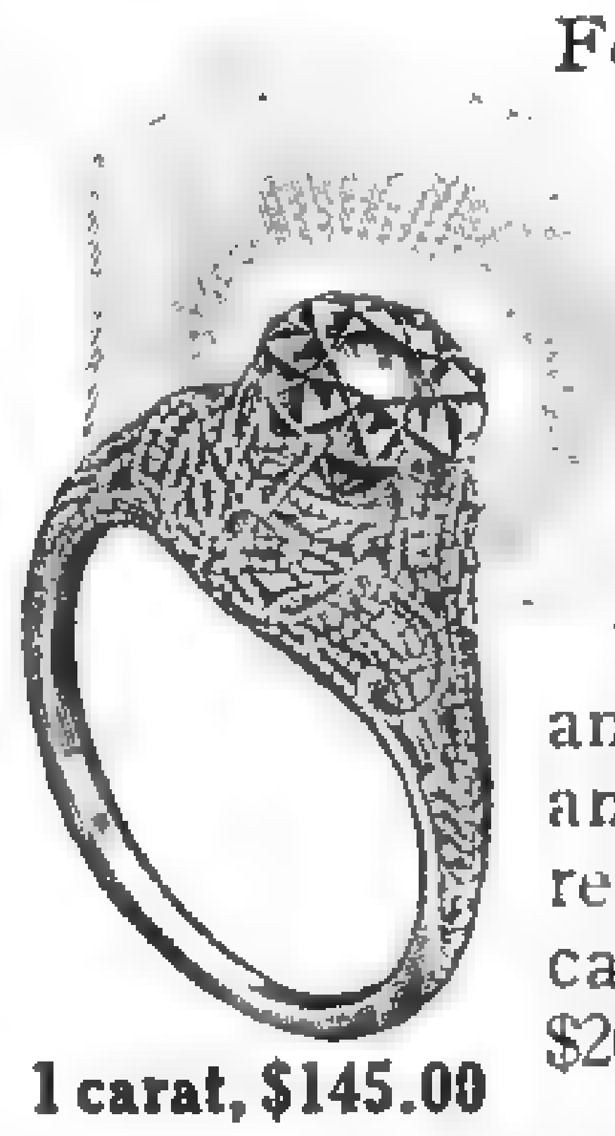

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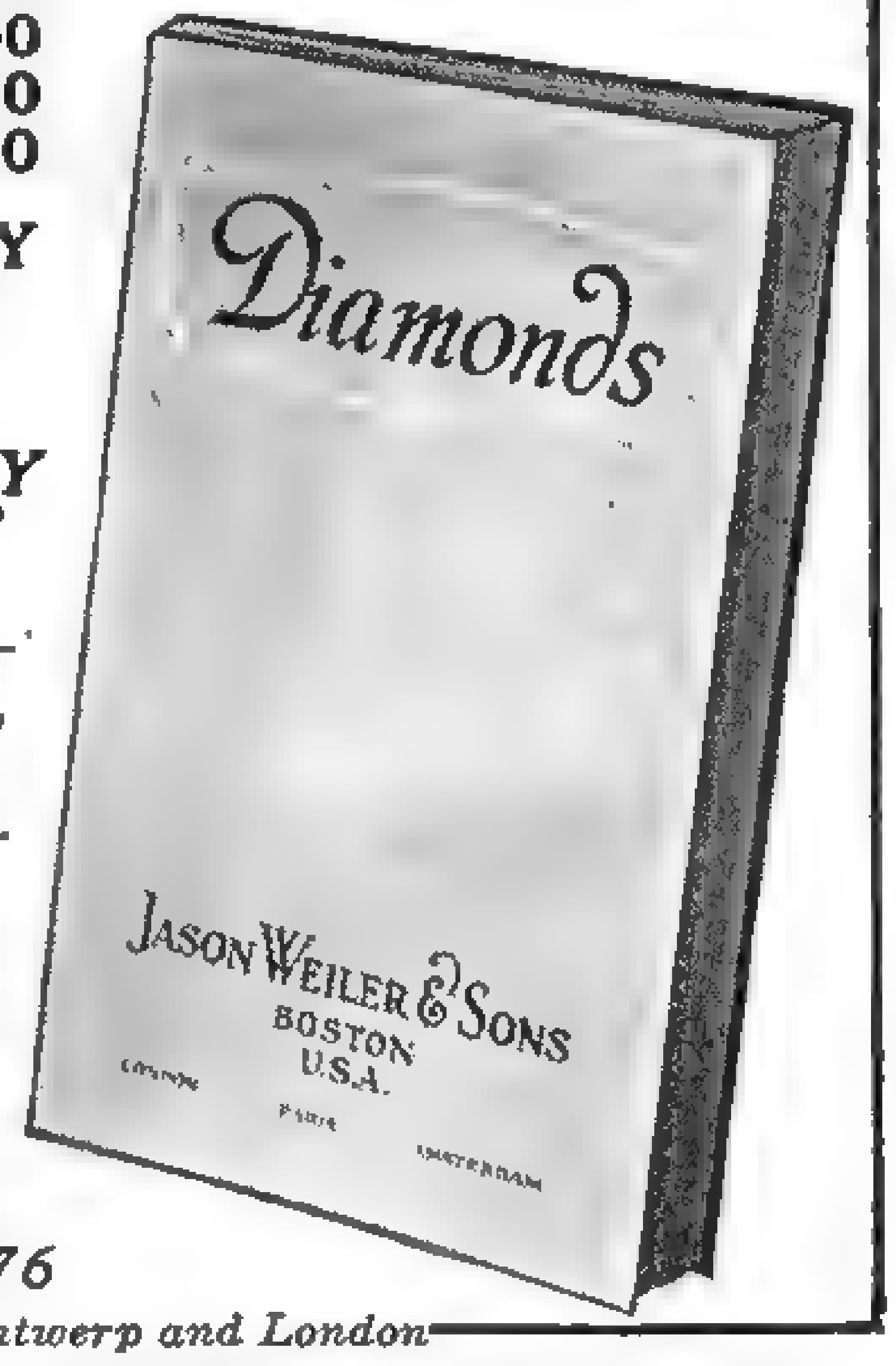

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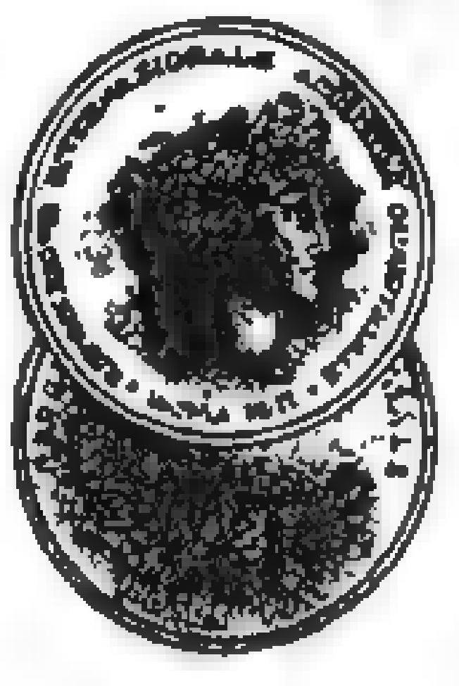
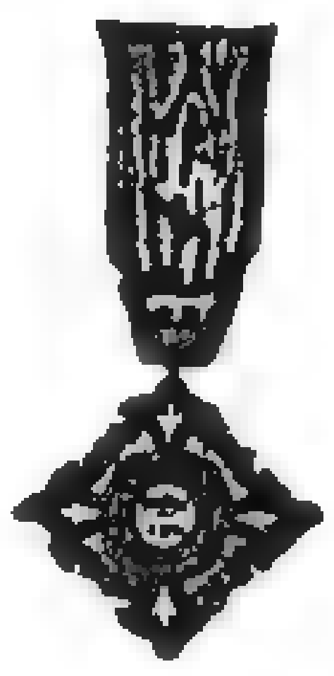


Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal



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Take salesmanship, for instance. To the vast majority, a salesman has to be "born" to his task. Nothing could be further from the truth. Possibly **you** think that selling is a "gift."

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You may think it remarkable that this Association can teach men at home during spare time to sell so quickly and easily. But there is nothing remarkable about it—for Salesmanship is governed by fundamental rules and principles. There are certain ways to attract attention, arouse interest and make prospects act—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudices, outwit competition and **get results.** Once you know these secrets of master salesmanship, you can duplicate any of the successes this remarkable System of Salesmanship Training has been responsible for.

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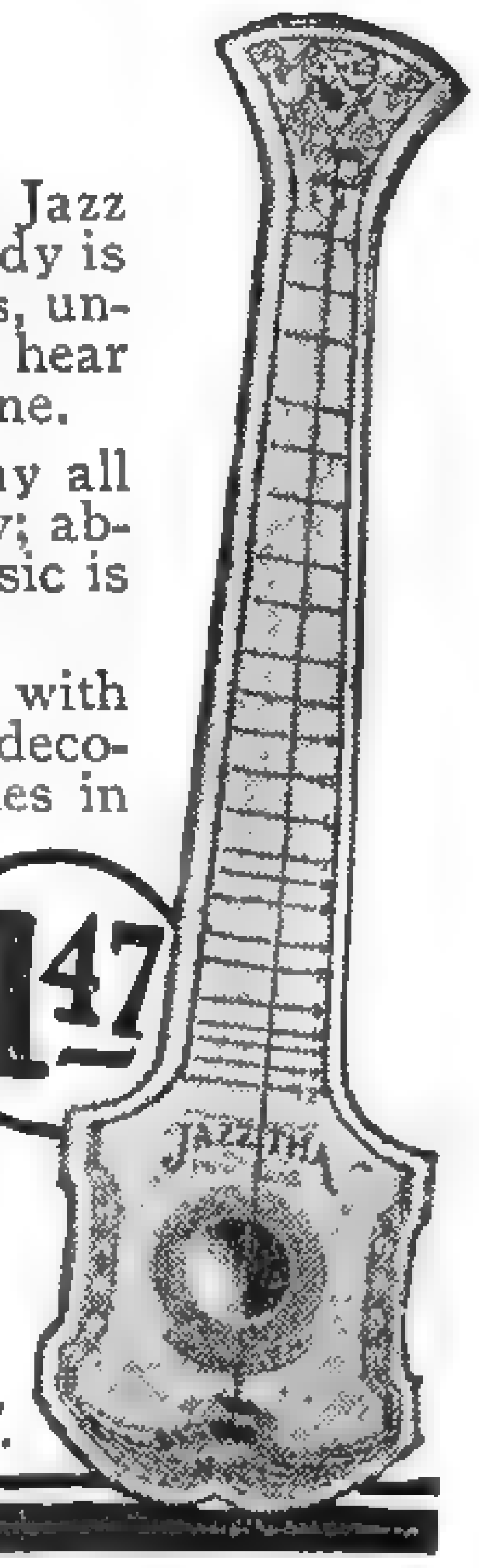

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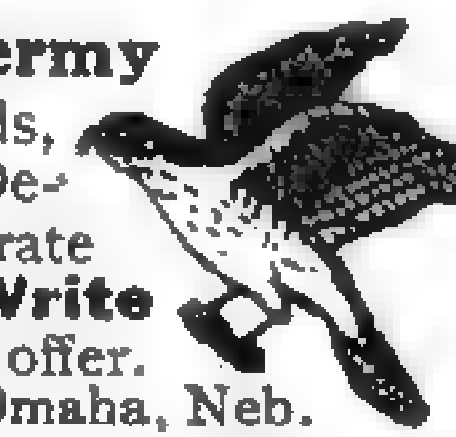

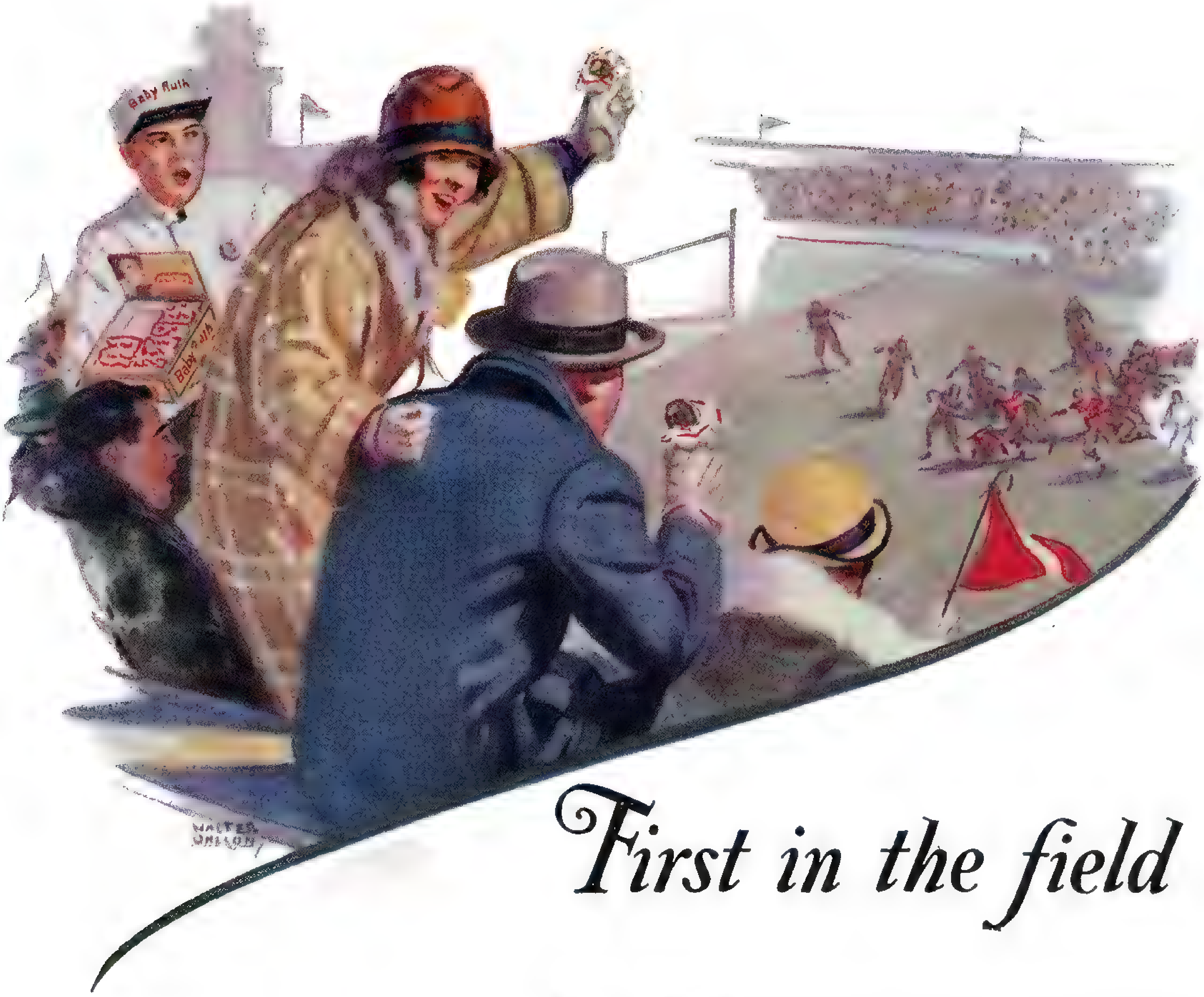
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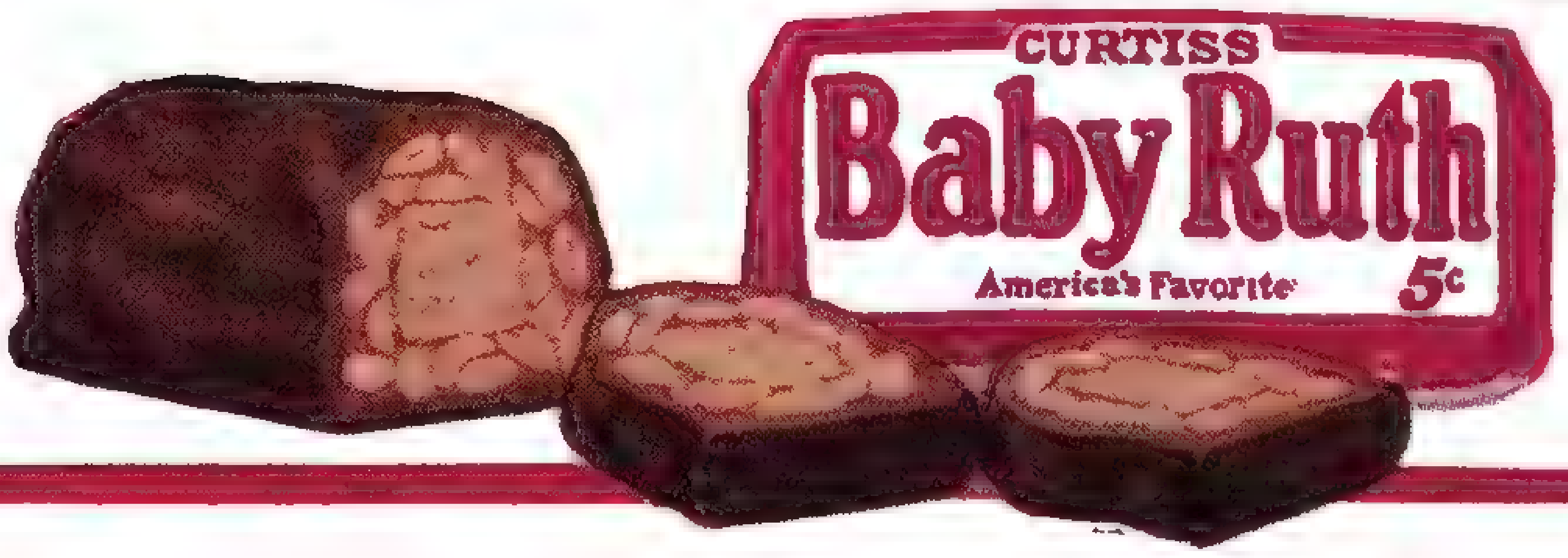
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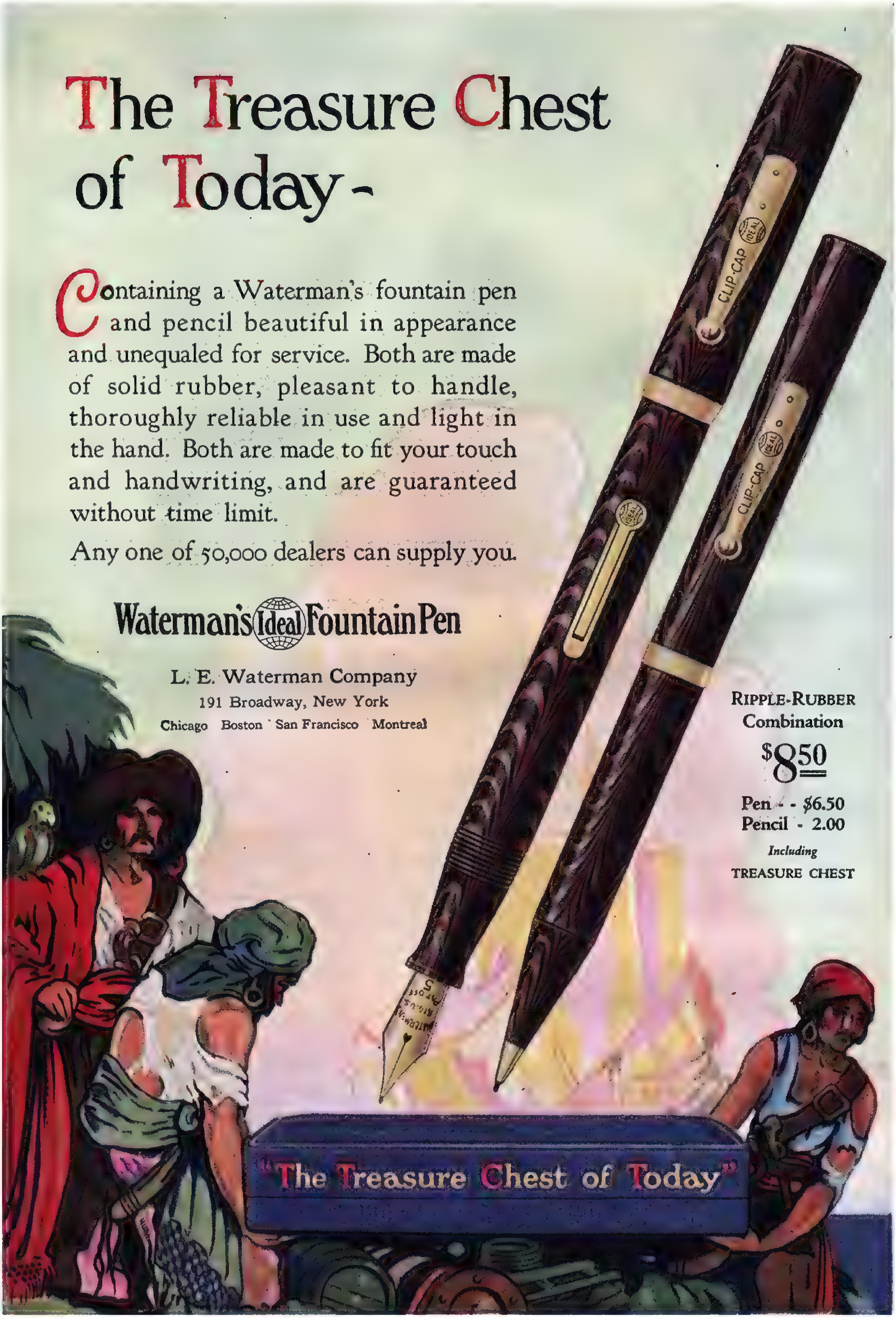
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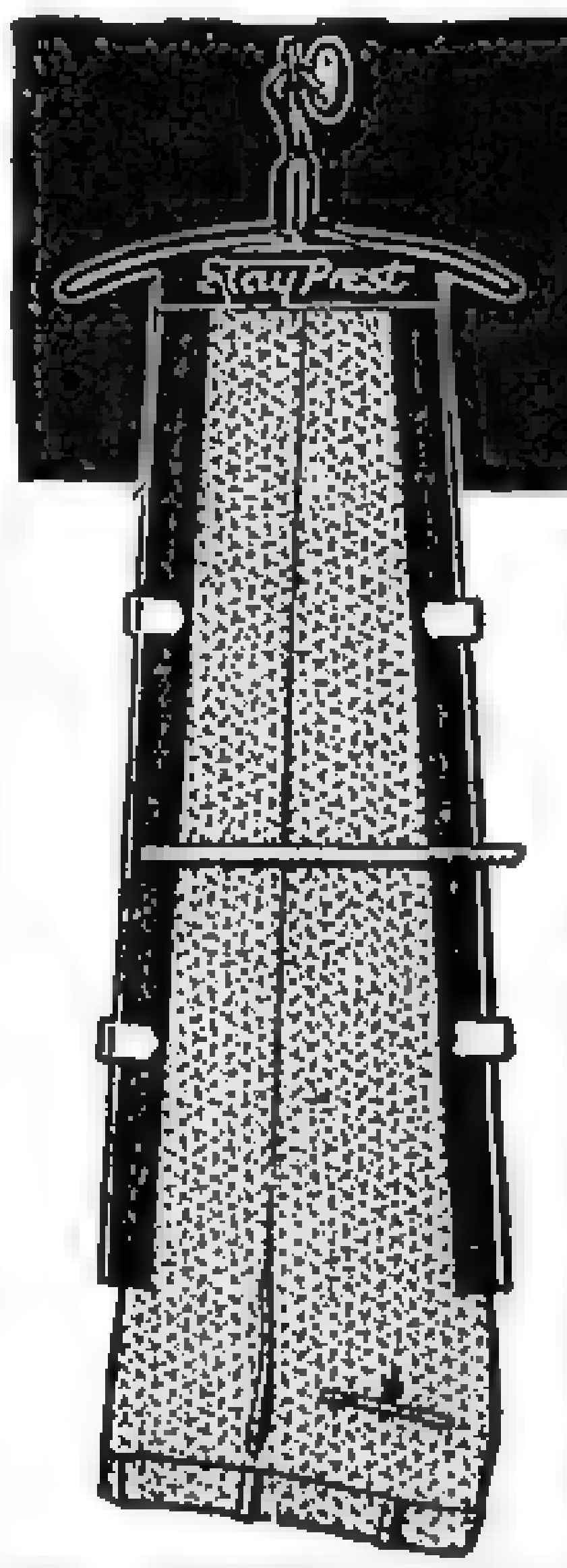

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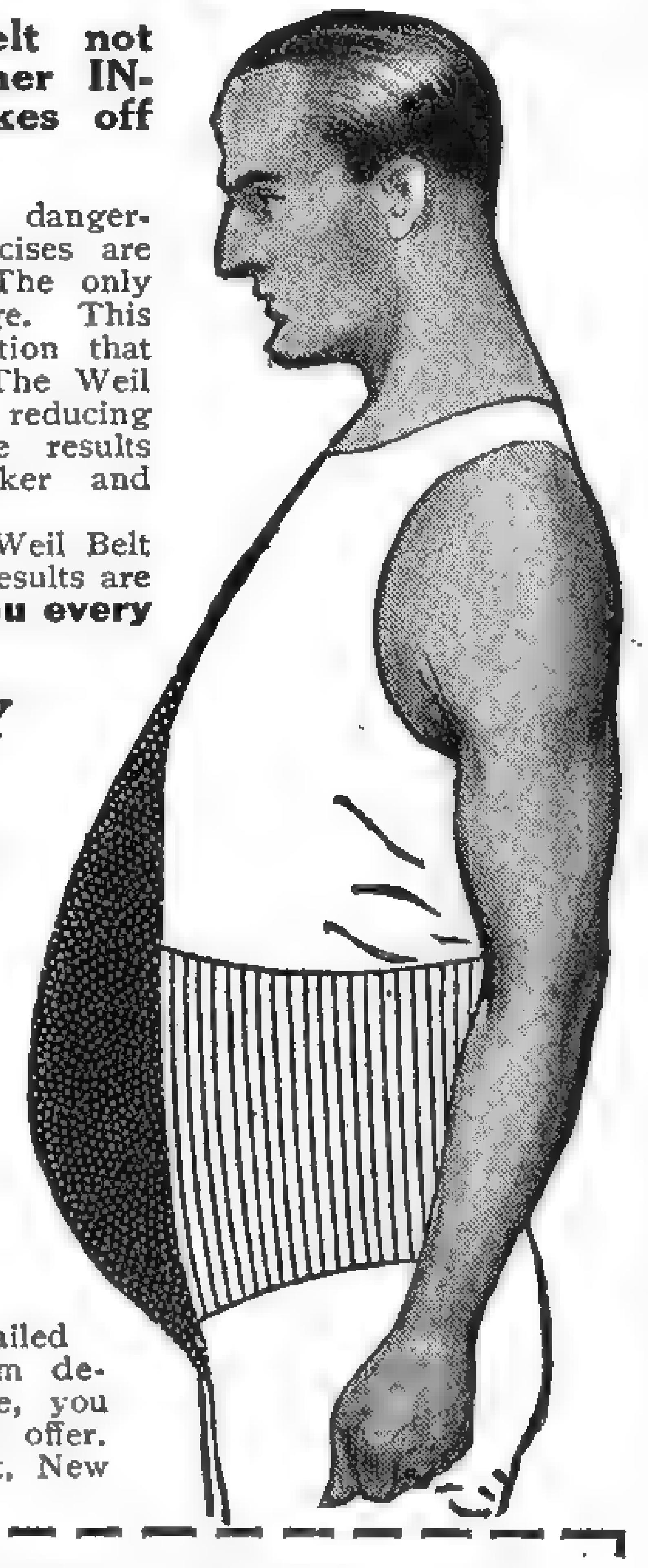

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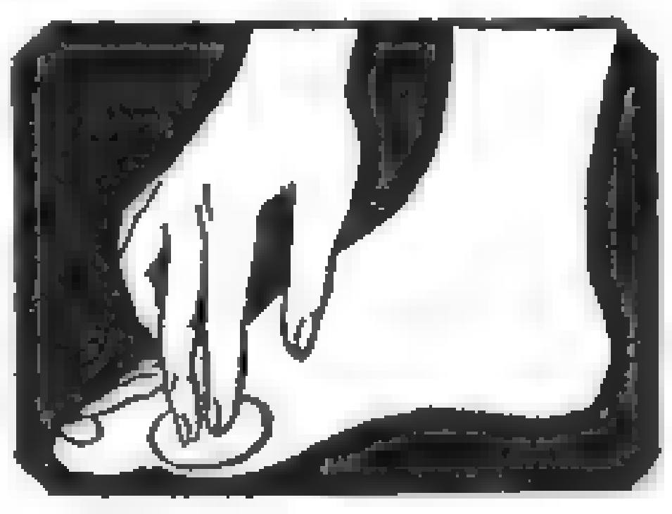

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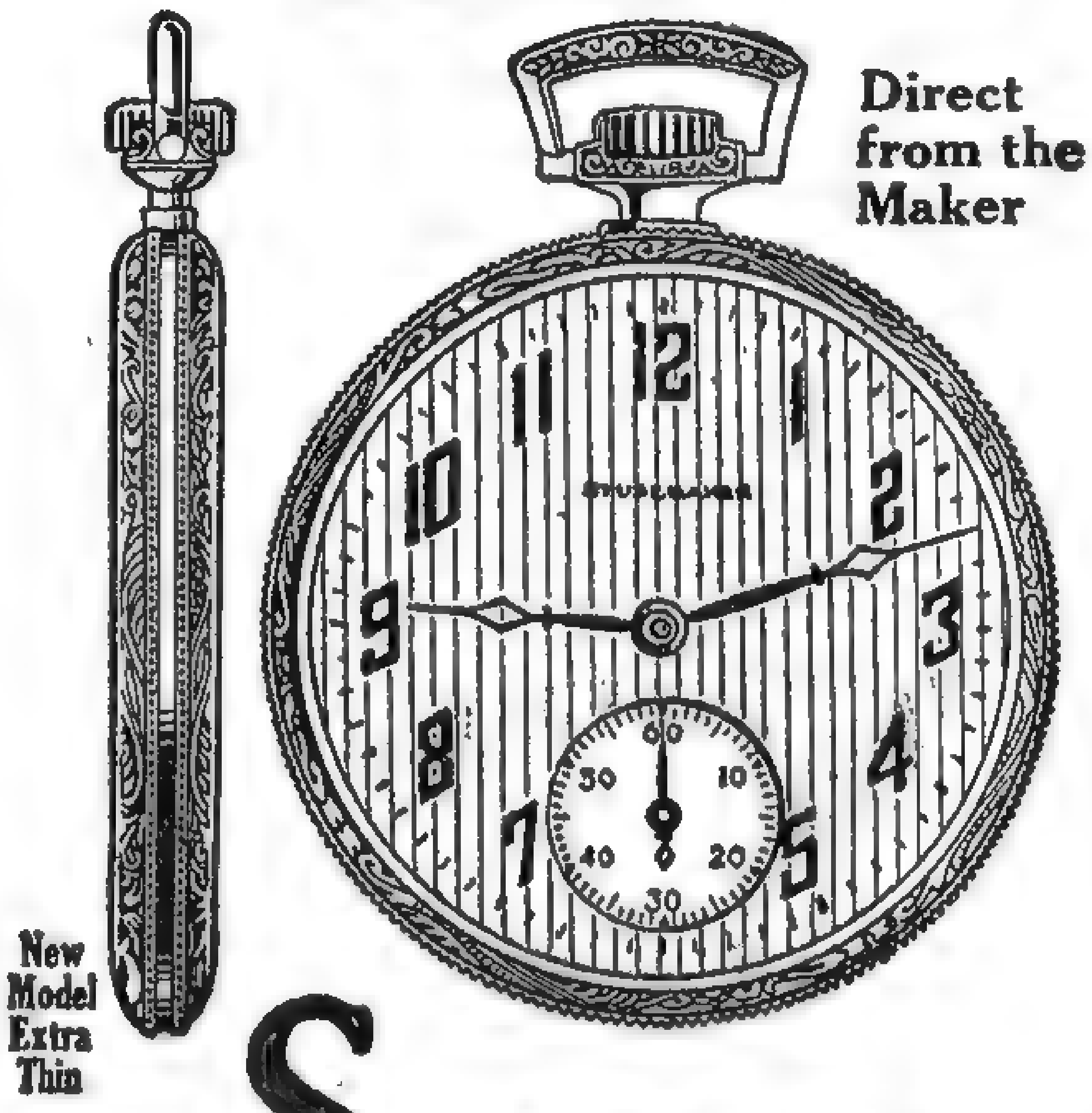

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Adventures on Location

THE biggest thrills in the lives of stars and directors are not always recorded on the screen. Floods, wild animals, shipwrecks and savages are only a few of the unexpected dangers that have interrupted the making of films. Estelle Taylor, who starred with Thomas Meighan in "The Alaskan," was nearly engulfed in quicksands. A motion-picture company headed by Henry McRea in the Philippines was threatened by a tribe of kriss-armed Moros, and the terrors of a jungle expedition conducted by Edward Laemmle finally frightened the camera hunters into making their own coffins.

A dozen or more true stories of adventures that outrival fiction are told by Alice L. Tildesley in EVERYBODY'S for November in "Adventures on Strange Locations." Some are weird, some dramatic, some humorous. And most of them happened so unexpectedly that they were never recorded for the screen.

There are other true stories of an adventurous cast featured in the same issue of EVERYBODY'S. Dr. Edward W. Nelson, head of the United States Biological Survey, supervises the greatest hunting organization in the world. His life story, told by Herbert Corey, is the fascinating record of a man who began as a boy naturalist and now has behind him over a half a century of experience as an explorer and conservationist of bird and animal life.

Visitors from all over the world come to the New York Aquarium to see Dr. Charles Haskins Townsend's collection of fishes. Dr. Townsend, too, has devoted a lifetime to his specialty. His fascinating story of how the seven seas are searched for specimens is a feature of the November

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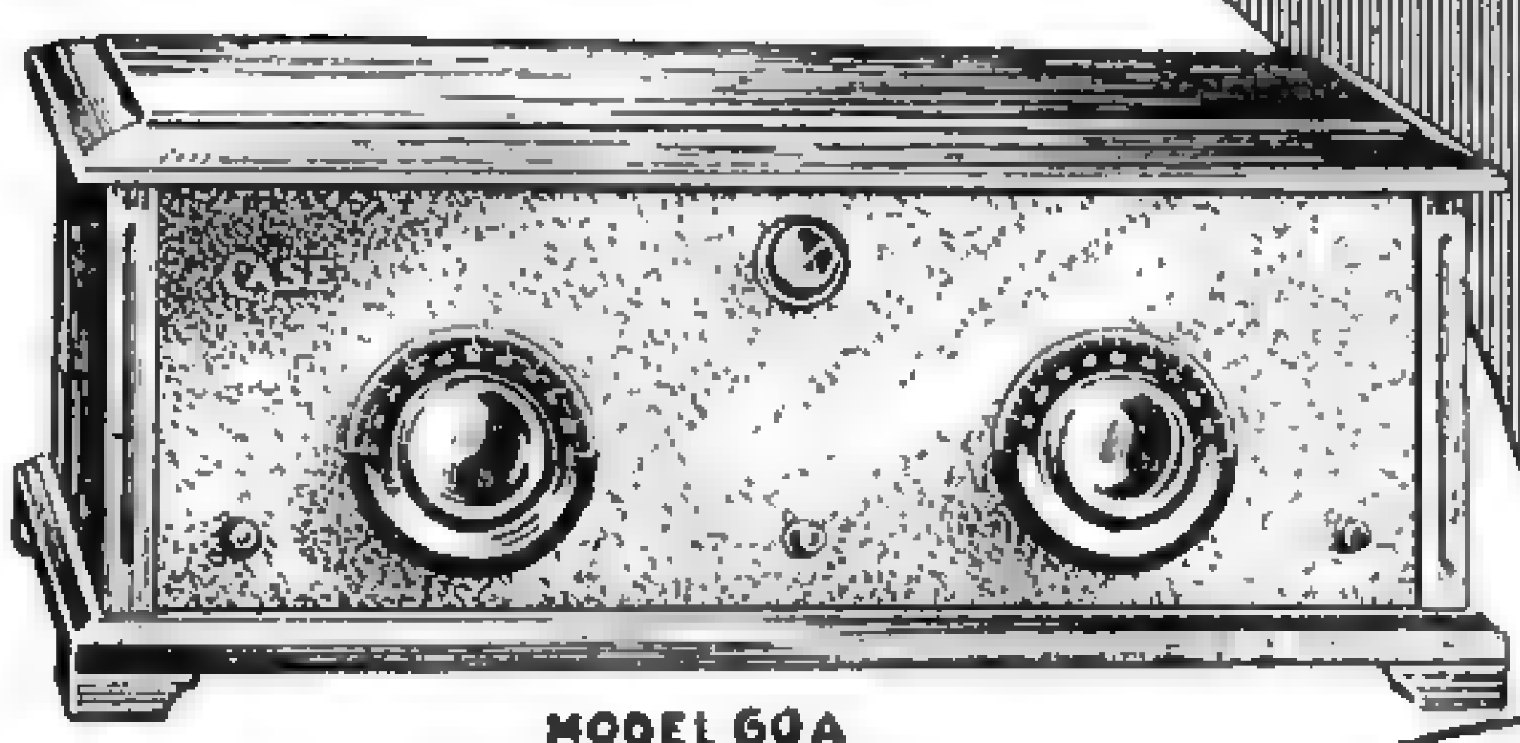

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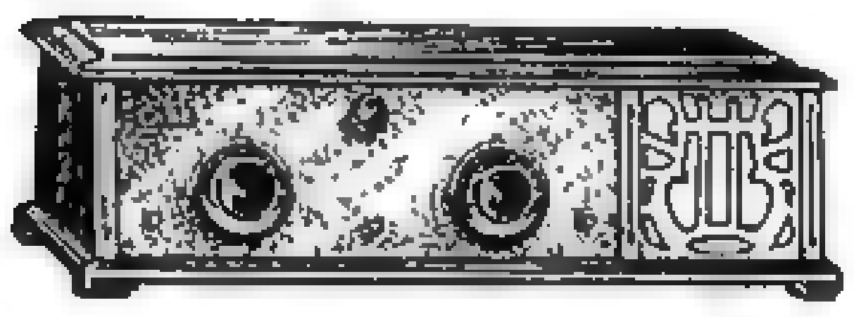

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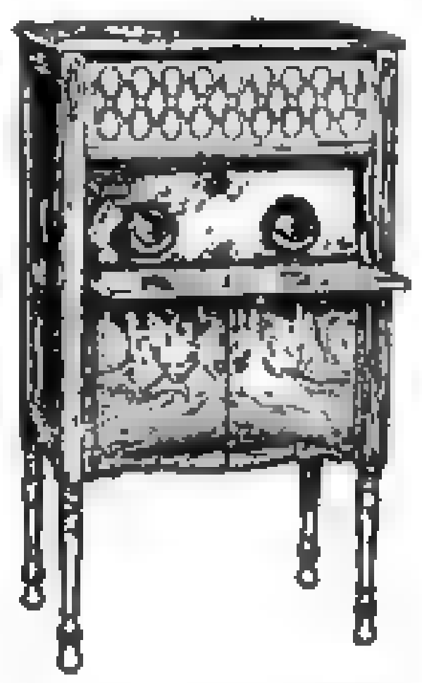

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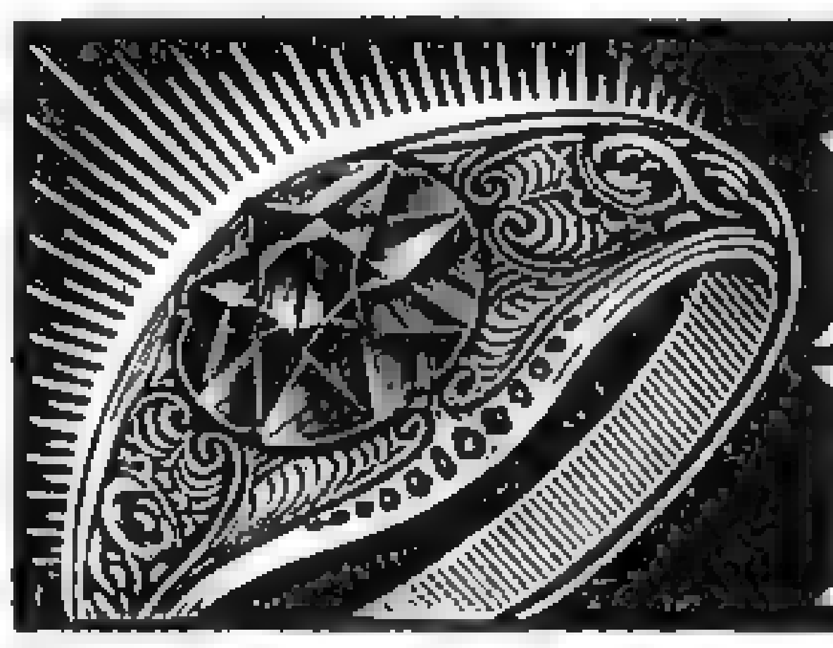

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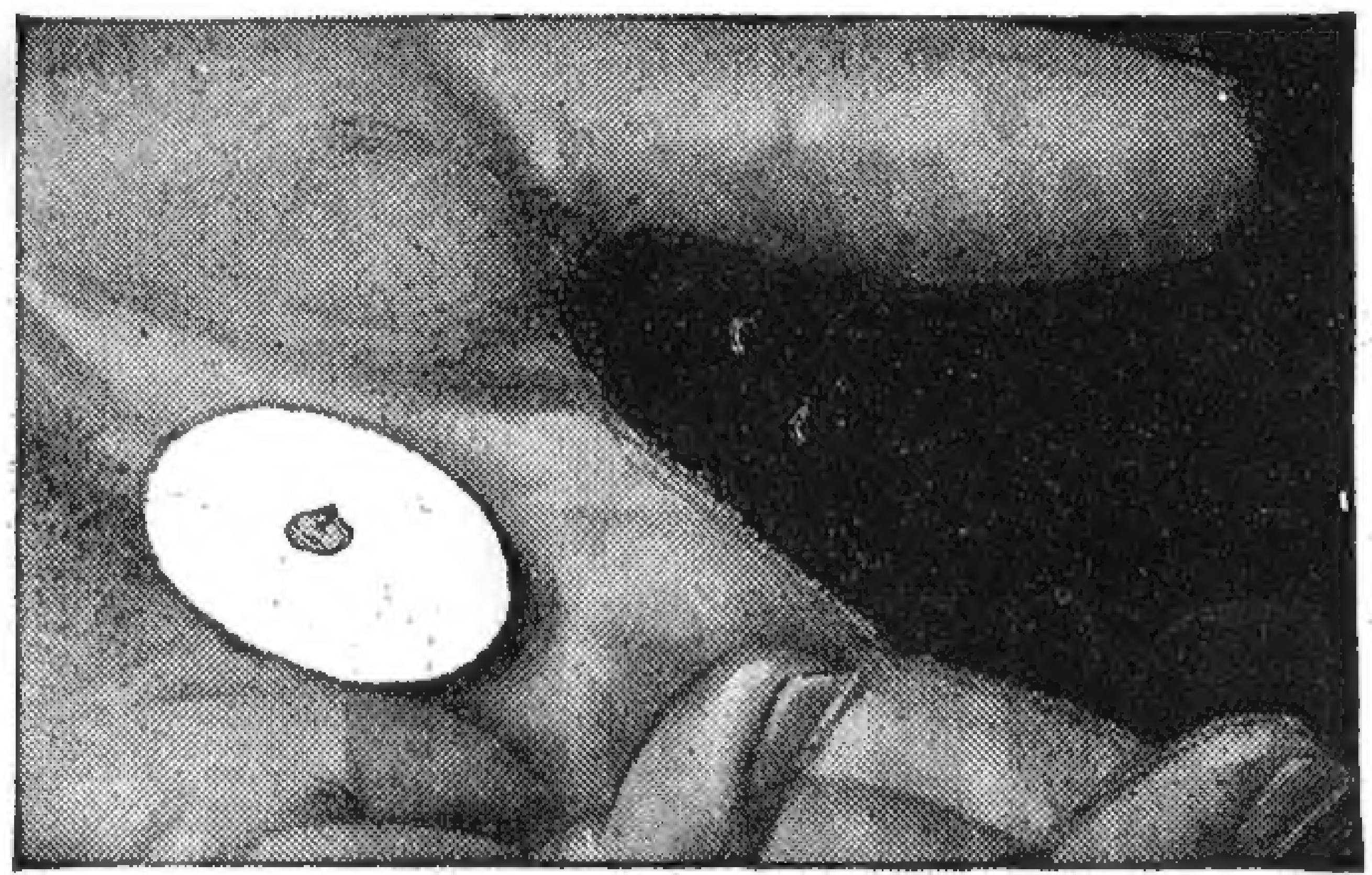

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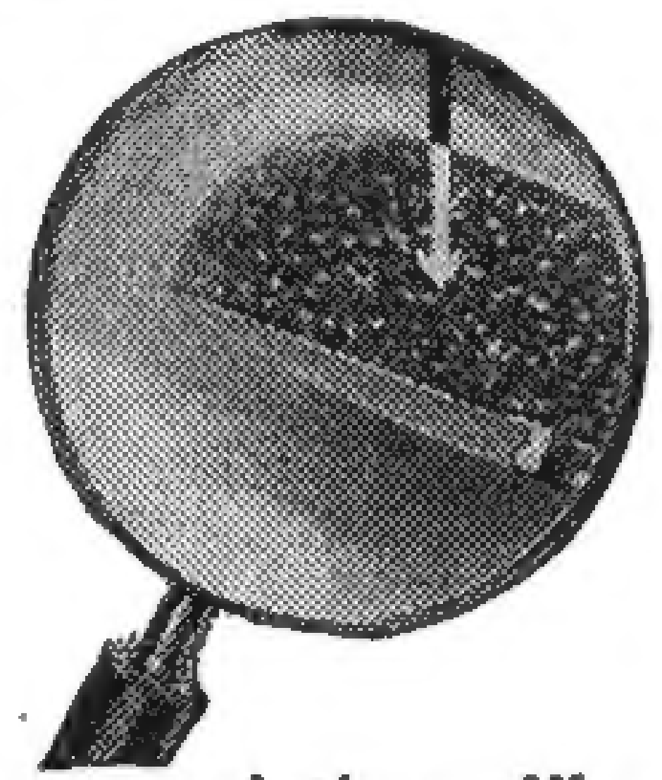

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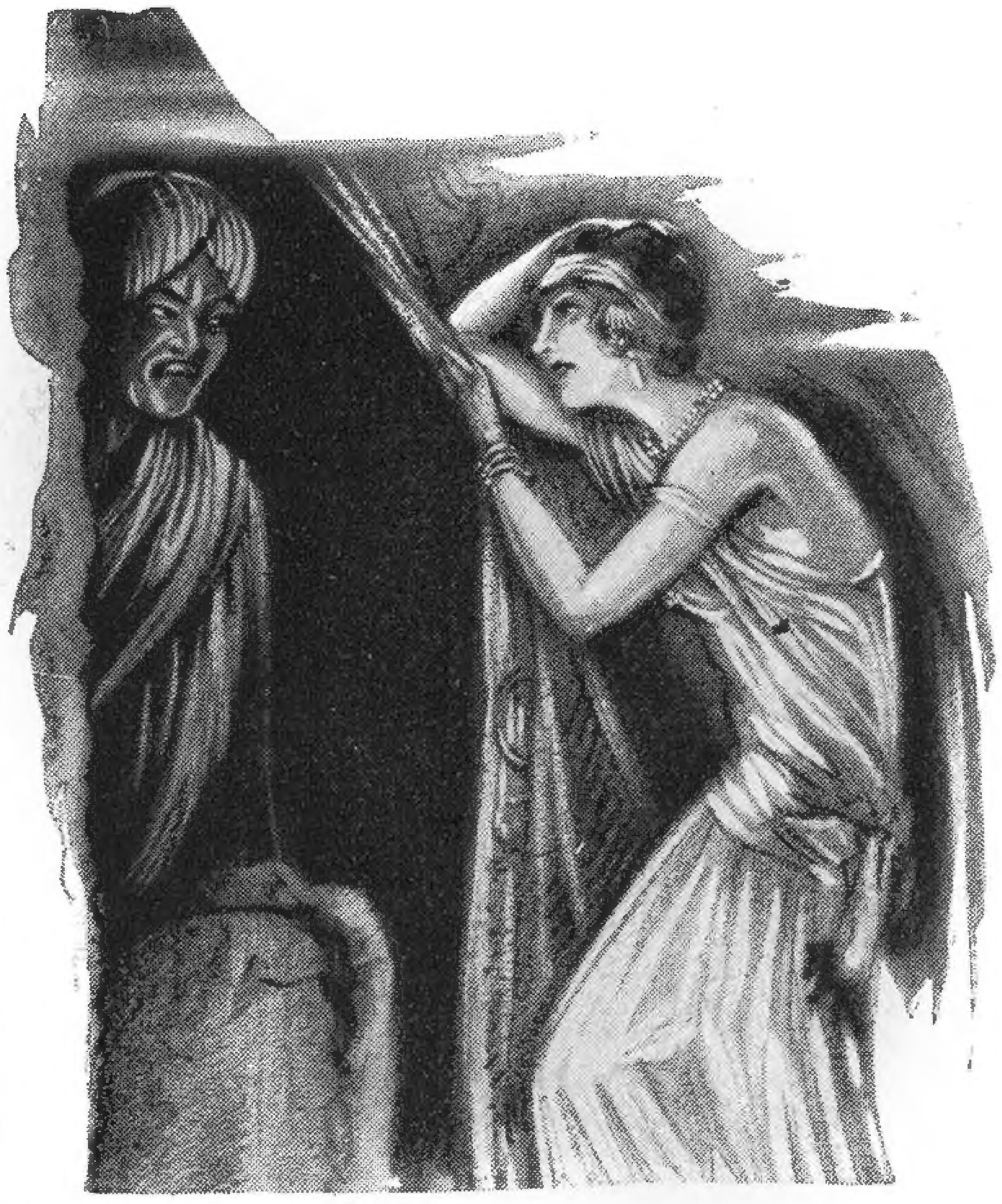

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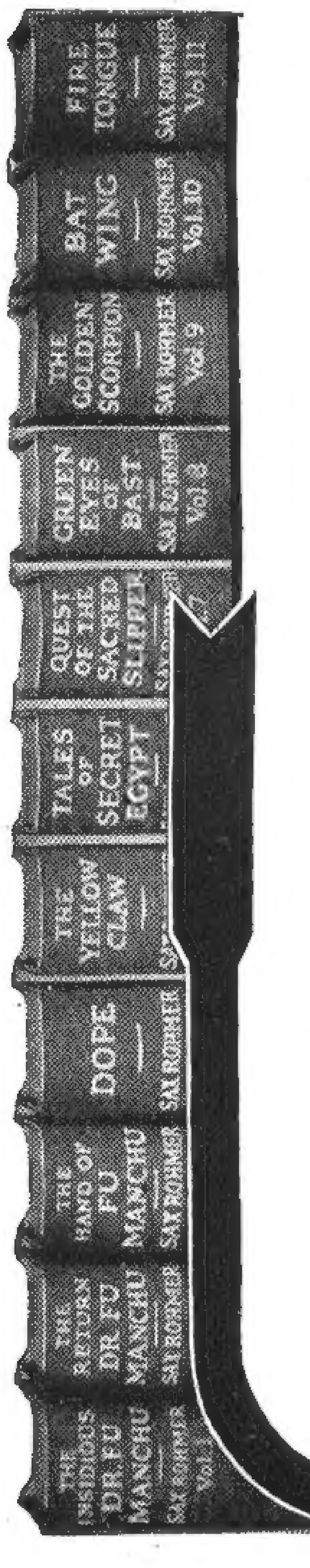
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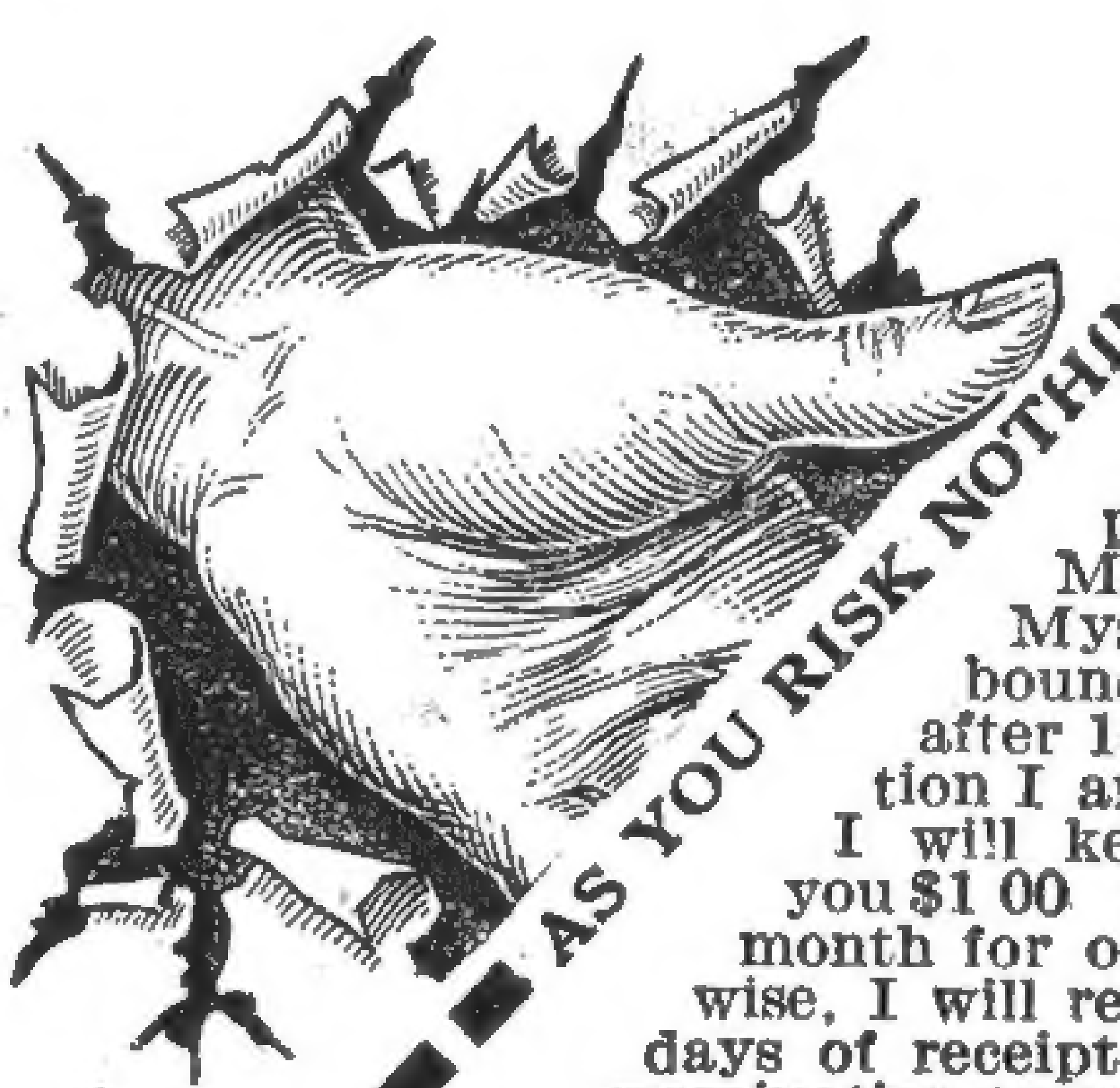

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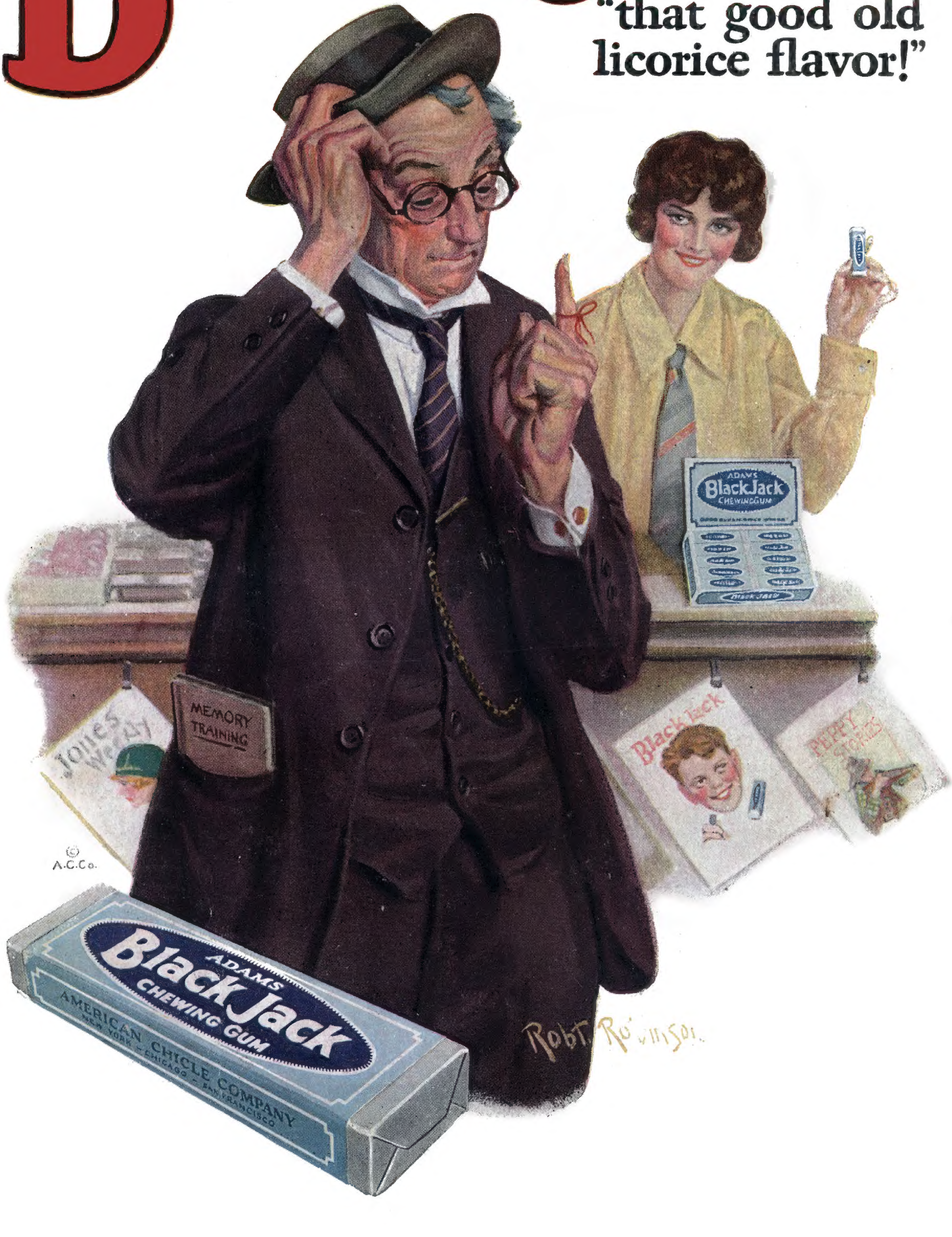
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